

Sudan
president
says
ready to
let south
secede

Iraqi FM arrives today

AMMAN (J.T.) — Iraqi Foreign Minister Mohammad Saeed Al Sahhaf is due to arrive in Amman today for a two-day visit, officials said Monday. "The Iraqi foreign minister is expected to hold talks with His Majesty King Abdullah and senior Jordanian officials on bilateral and regional issues," one official source told the Jordan Times Monday. Sahhaf's visit to Amman comes as part of a regional tour aimed at shedding light on the present situation in Iraq.

Jordan Times

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'King to meet with Netanyahu on Sunday'

TEL AVIV (AFP) — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu plans to travel to Amman Sunday for talks with His Majesty King Abdullah, a senior Israeli official said Monday. "The prime minister is likely to meet King Abdullah on Sunday," the close aide to Netanyahu told AFP. He said Israel was waiting for final confirmation of the meeting from the Royal Palace in Amman. Israel Radio said Netanyahu would be accompanied by Foreign Minister Ariel Sharon. Netanyahu and Sharon had been due to visit King Abdullah on Feb. 7, but that meeting was cancelled when King Hussein returned from the U.S.

Two U.S. cabinet members held in contempt

WASHINGTON (R) — A federal judge on Monday found two of President Bill Clinton's top cabinet members, Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt and Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin, in contempt of court for failing to produce records of native American trust funds. The contempt finding against the two U.S. cabinet members stemmed from a civil lawsuit filed in 1996 by five native Americans claiming the federal government mismanaged billions of dollars in the trust funds. U.S. District Judge Royce Lamberth found "clear and convincing evidence" that Babbitt, Rubin and Assistant Interior Secretary Kevin Gover were in contempt for disobeying his earlier orders requiring that the documents be produced. "The federal government... engaged in a shocking pattern of deception of the court. I have never seen more egregious conduct by the federal government," he said in the 76-page ruling.

Children, teacher stabbed in Latvia

RIGA (AFP) — Three young children and their teacher were stabbed to death Monday in the eastern Latvian town of Gulbene, police said. A 21-year-old man entered a nursery in the town at around 2:00 p.m. local time and stabbed three girls, who were aged five to seven, and their teacher, 32, police said. A suspect trying to flee the town was later detained.

NYC seizes cars of drunken drivers

NEW YORK (AFP) — New York City stepped up the war on drinking and driving Monday, authorizing police to seize the cars of drunken drivers. Under the initiative, any driver found behind the wheel of the car with a blood alcohol reading of 0.1 percent will immediately forfeit their car in addition to any criminal proceedings for driving under the influence. The American Civil Liberties Union immediately announced it would challenge the decision in the courts.

EU farmers, police clash during demo

BRUSSELS (AP) — Tens of thousands of farmers from across the European Union demonstrated in Brussels Monday, and some fought pitched battles with police over plans to reform the EU's bloated agricultural subsidy programmes. The protesters marched despite hail, snow, sleet and high winds during one of the worst days of a bad winter. Police cordoned off a wide zone around EU headquarters and intervened with water cannons when some demonstrators attacked them with cobblestones, uprooted trees and traffic signs in attempts to cross heavily guarded barbed-wire barricades.

Iraq denies Shiite unrest; reported death toll tops 100

AMMAN (AFP) — The death toll in Shiite Muslim protests in Iraq sparked by the assassination of a senior cleric has topped 100 in Baghdad, Iraqi sources said Monday, as the government denied riots were sweeping the capital and southern towns.

With journalists in the Iraqi capital barred from visiting the scenes of the reported unrest until Tuesday at the earliest, no confirmation was available of either of the conflicting accounts.

Armoured vehicles patrolled the streets of many of Iraq's main cities as clashes with the Shiite Muslim protesters entered a third straight day leaving at least 100 dead in Baghdad alone, witnesses and other Iraqi sources told AFP.

The unrest in towns across the mainly Shiite south as well as in Shiite districts of Baghdad prompted the authorities to resort to artillery shelling against one of the flashpoints, exiled opposition groups said.

The Iraqi government firmly denied it all.

"We reaffirm that any talk of disturbances and riots in Iraq is totally unfounded," the director of the official news agency INA, Uday Al Tai, told reporters in Baghdad.

Tai said the information ministry would organise guided tours for journalists to see two southern provinces.

"You will recognise by yourselves that all the allegations promoted by those seeking to dismember the unity of the steadfast people of Iraq and to undermine their own country's sovereignty were mere figments of imagination."

Iraqi state television, as part of efforts to discredit reports of unrest, on Monday broadcast scenes of normal activity in the Shiite holy city of Najaf.

A large number of Shiites were shown praying at the mausoleum of Imam Hussein, while other scenes were of normal traffic and activity in the marketplace of the southern city.

Iraqi TV also broadcast services of condolence for Ayatollah Mohammad Sadeq Al Sader, the top Shiite cleric who was gunned down in the city with two of his sons on Friday, sparking the reported anti-government unrest on Saturday.

It was unclear when the film was taken.

A newspaper also reported Monday that President Saddam Hussein had sent an envoy to Najaf to present his condolences to the family of the slain cleric.

Babel said the president sent Mohammad Hamza Al Zubaidi, a Shiite member of the deci-

sion-making Revolutionary Command Council, on Sunday.

The family of the cleric "expressed their gratitude" to Saddam, according to the newspaper, which is run by the president's son Uday.

While the Iraqi authorities dismissed the reports of unrest, an Iraqi source contacted by telephone from Amman said the security forces had been placed on maximum alert.

"Armoured vehicles and armed members of the ruling Baath Party are patrolling the streets of the capital and all other towns, particularly the Shiite towns in the south," the source said.

One witness said that security forces had "fired blindly into crowds of demonstrators (in Baghdad's Saddam City) leaving a real carnage."

Despite reports from witnesses that the trouble had died down in the suburbs and in Najaf, exiled opposition groups insisted unrest was continuing.

The latest protests were centred on the southern towns of Hilla, Karbala and Nasiriyah, as well as parts of the capital, the opposition said.

At least 18 people were killed in Nasiriyah when army units encircled the town and shelled it with heavy artillery and mortars, the Tehran-based Supreme

Council of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) said.

In Babylon province just south of the capital, "clashes between residents and Republican Guards and Baath party members left dozens dead and injured," it said.

The group's leader Ayatollah Mohammad Baqr Al Hakim gave a death toll of 25 dead and 250 injured from the first two days of clashes.

Another Shiite opposition group, the Da'wa party, said the clashes escalated in the capital Monday with protesters attacking offices of the ruling Baath Party and killing "large numbers" of regime supporters.

The group also charged that the regime was stopping travellers from the south reaching Baghdad in a bid to prevent news of the unrest there reaching the capital.

The clashes are the first report of widespread unrest in Iraq since 1991, when a bloody crackdown suppressed a Shiite uprising in southern and central Iraq following Baghdad's defeat by a U.S.-led coalition in the 1991 Gulf War.

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Two police officers chat Monday in front of a military jeep, as a soldier stands nearby on a main street in Diyarbakir, Turkey. Many shops in the city centre were closed for a few hours after PKK rebels threatened shopowners in protest against the capture of their leader Abdullah Ocalan (AP photo)

Turkey warns Greece of 'right to self-defence over PKK support'

Ocalan admits Greek support for rebels — report

Agencies

TURKISH PRESIDENT Suleyman Demirel accused Greece of supporting Kurdish rebels fighting the Ankara government and warned Turkey would use its "right to self-defence" if this support continued, Turkey's NTV news channel said Monday.

"If (Greece) prefers to continue its illegal acts, we reserve our right to take measures aimed at legitimate self-defence which arises from international law," Demirel was reported to have said in a television interview in the Philippines, where he is on an official visit.

Demirel charged that Greece had for long years been an "accomplice" of the outlawed Kurdish Labour Party (PKK), adding that Greek officials had themselves admitted to supporting the group, which Ankara regards as "terrorists."

"Greece should be included in the list of countries which support terrorism and abet terrorists. Such a state can only be described as an illegal state," he said.

NTV quoted Demirel as saying that Ankara would like to give Athens "one more chance" and calling on Greek officials to condemn the Kurdish Labour Party (PKK) and comply with their international obligations.

Ocalan has told interrogators that Greece gave his guerrilla army weapons and training, a Turkish newspaper reported Monday.

The national daily newspaper Hurriyet said Ocalan provided

interrogators with details about military aid the PKK had received from Greece.

"Greece has for years supported the PKK movement. They even gave us arms and rockets. Greek officers gave guerrilla training and explosives training to our militants" at a camp in Lavrion, Greece, the newspaper quoted Ocalan as telling interrogators.

There was no immediate response to the allegations in Greece, where Monday was a public holiday. Lavrion is the site of a United Nations refugee centre, housing mainly Kurdish refugees from Turkey.

In response to past Turkish allegations, the camp has been examined repeatedly by international observers, who were unable to substantiate charges it served as a military training centre for the PKK.

Hurriyet said Ocalan's interrogation sessions were being videotaped, but did not say how it had obtained the rebel leader's statements.

Athens, meanwhile, accused Turkey Monday of "trying to plot against Greece with imprecise statements and tall tales."

Greek government spokesman Dimitris Reppas said Turkey had no right to attack its attitude to the Kurds given its own "illegal occupation of Cyprus" and its "systematic legal and human rights violations."

On Monday, the European Union said it expected Turkey to give Ocalan a fair trial and to let international observers attend.

The statement by EU foreign ministers seemed likely to further inflame relations with Turkey, which has warned the 15-nation bloc not to try to exert pressure on it.

The ministers also said that while they accepted Turkey's territorial integrity, they expected it to resolve its problems by political means with full respect for human rights.

"The EU takes note of the assurances of the Turkish government that Abdullah Ocalan will have a fair trial," the EU ministers said in the statement.

"It expects this to mean fair and correct treatment and an open trial according to the rule of law before an independent court, with access to legal counsel of his choice and with international observers admitted to the trial."

Demirel's comments were the strongest reaction from Ankara to neighbouring Athens after Greece admitted that Ocalan took shelter for 12 days at the Greek ambassador's residence in Nairobi, Kenya, before being brought to Turkey on Tuesday.

Athens' involvement in the Ocalan affair has already led to the resignations of three Greek ministers and the head of the Greek secret service, with calls from the opposition for the resignation of Prime Minister Costas Simitis as well.

Ankara has accused Athens several times of supporting the PKK, which has been fighting for self-rule in mostly Kurdish-populated southeastern Turkey since 1984.

Economic delegation returns from talks in Saudi Arabia

AMMAN (J.T.) — Jordan's top-level economic team returned here last night from Saudi Arabia, where they met with Crown Prince Abdullah Ben Abdul Aziz to discuss means to develop an institutional framework for long-term trade and economic ties.

The delegation conveyed greetings from His Majesty King Abdullah and HRH Crown Prince Hamzah to King Fahd Ben Abdul Aziz and the crown prince.

During a meeting with Saudi Finance Minister Ibrahim Assaf, the team of Finance Minister Michel Marto, Minister of State for Development Affairs Taher Kan'an, Planning Minister Nabil Ammar and Economic Advisor to the Prime Minister Bassam Awadallah discussed Saudi financial aid to Jordan, Jordan Television reported.

The ministers also reviewed obstacles to the advancement of the Jordanian economy.

Saudi leaders, in particular the crown prince, have expressed support for Jordan after King Abdullah acceded to the Throne earlier this month following the death of King Hussein.

Assaf, who visited Amman last week for talks with Jordanian Prime Minister Fayez Tarawneh, said Saudi Arabia

would continue its financial aid to Jordan.

On Sunday, the Associated Press quoted Saudi officials as saying that Riyadh was ready to make a deposit of \$250 million as a first step to help the Jordanian economy. The agency also reported that Saudi Arabia was considering giving Jordan aid, loans and oil supplies at preferential prices.

Earlier this month, the Saudi-owned newspaper Al Sharq Al Awsat had reported that Saudi Arabia was ready to supply Jordan with oil at cut-rate prices.

Kan'an on Sunday said a delegation from the Saudi Development Fund would visit Amman soon for talks on the projects which it would like Riyadh to help finance, particularly infrastructure projects.

Before the team's departure to Riyadh on Saturday, Marto told the Jordan Times that they intended to discuss the reactivation of institutional funds and expansion of bilateral trade, as well as encourage Saudi investments in Jordan, including possible joint projects.

The delegation also met with Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud Al Faisal for discussions on bilateral ties and means of enhancing them.

U.S. bombs sites in Iraq; Baghdad reports casualties

WASHINGTON (AFP) — U.S. fighter jets bombed sites in both northern and southern Iraq Monday in response to "provocation," the U.S. military said.

The bombing in the south "was in response to two Iraqi MiG 23 jets entering the southern no-fly zone," said Major Joe Lamacra, spokesman for the U.S. Central Command in Tampa, Florida.

"We've seen this pattern of cheat-and-retreat by the Iraqi aircraft for several months now, and that's provocation enough to strike," he said.

Iraq's official INA news agency reported one Iraqi had been killed and several others wounded.

An Iraqi military spokesman, quoted by INA, said 10 formations of "enemy" planes carried out 32 sorties in a "no-fly" zone over southern Iraq, penetrating the country from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait.

Lamacra said the Iraqi MiG jets had not attacked allied forces, but their flight over the no-fly zone imposed on Iraq by U.S. and British forces since the 1991 Gulf War was considered sufficient cause for reprisal.

"We have said repeatedly that we would respond to any Iraqi provocation as we deem appropriate to ensure the safety of our forces in the area, and that's

what we did," Lamacra said.

He said U.S. Air Force F-15E Strike Eagles and British GR-1 Tornados hit two communications facilities and two weapons storage facilities in the vicinity of Basra, Iraq.

As for the Iraqi reports of one death and several wounded, "that's something Iraq has said many times... they've made claims of casualties, but we have no independent confirmation of those," Lamacra said.

"As always we continue to make every effort possible to minimise civilian casualties and collateral damage," he said.

According to Iraq, which does not recognise exclusion zones enforced in the north and south by Washington and London, 11 people have been killed in attacks by U.S. and British warplanes since Feb. 4.

Meanwhile, in northern Iraq, U.S. fighter jets also dropped eleven precision-guided bombs on anti-aircraft artillery and radar sites Monday after being targeted by radar and fired upon, the U.S. European command reported.

The U.S. F-15E jets had been "conducting routine enforcement of the northern no-fly zone when they were attacked, and they responded by bombing sites near Mosul, Iraq, according to the U.S. European Command."

Minister dismisses reports on foreign policy

AMMAN (J.T.) — Foreign Minister Abdul Ilah Khatib Monday said the government was astonished at "damaging" reports in weekly newspapers concerning the Kingdom's relations with several nations, including Iraq and Iran.

In a statement to the Jordan News Agency, Petra, Khatib said Jordan's policy towards Arab and Muslim states is clear and well-known.

The Kingdom's policy on Iraq, the minister said, calls for action to end the suffering of the Iraqi people and to safeguard Iraq's sovereignty, territorial integrity and indepen-

dence. He said Jordan also calls for non-interference in Iraq's internal affairs.

Reports in one Jordanian weekly charged that Amman was seeking to topple the regime in Baghdad and that the Kingdom saw Iran as a potential threat. Some opposition papers wrote that the Israeli secret intelligence service, Mossad, had opened an office in Amman.

Khatib dismissed these reports as totally false.

He said Jordan continues to call for the restoration of Arab solidarity and, together with other Arab states, is exerting

efforts to enhance such solidarity and improve inter-Arab ties.

The minister stressed that Jordan is keen on promoting its relations and cooperation with its Islamic sister state Iran in various fields. He said that Amman seeks to advance relations with Tehran in the best interest of the two countries and the Islamic Nation.

Attempts by certain circles to damage Jordan's relations with other countries and their desire to distort the Kingdom's clear and firm policies are no more than illusions that deserve no attention, Khatib said.

Arab American who faced deportation can stay

DETROIT (AP) — A Michigan resident who faced deportation based on an alleged connection to a radical Palestinian group can remain in the United States, the board of immigration appeals ruled.

The decision to allow Imad Hamad to stay is being called a civil rights victory by Arab Americans. "I was in tears when I heard the news," Hamad, 37, said in the Detroit Free Press' Monday edition. "This is a victory not just for me, but also for civil liberties in the U.S."

The Immigration and Naturalisation Service (INS) had been trying to deport Hamad for years, using secret evidence to link him with the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP).

Arab-American and civil liberties advocates made the case a priority, because they were concerned about the use of secret evidence and the penalising of Americans with Palestinian sympathies.

Last October, an immigration judge ruled in Hamad's favour.

The INS appealed, but last week a panel of immigration judges upheld the decision.

"The association with the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine is unproven," said the judges in their ruling.

"The evidence presented is vague, lacking in specificity, and uncorroborated," Hussein Ibhish of the American-Arab

Anti-Discrimination Committee, or ADC, in Washington, D.C., told the Free Press that the decision is a blow against government policies that punish American residents with pro-Arab views.

Hamad came to the United States from Lebanon in 1980 to study. He was active in Palestinian political causes, and demonstrated in a rally protesting Israel's invasion in 1982.

After marrying a U.S. citizen, he applied for permanent residency status.

The INS said he was a member of the PFLP, considered a terrorist group by the U.S. State Department, and sought to deport him. But Hamad said all his actions were in support of peaceful activities.

Netanyahu hints talk on Syria may just be opening position

TEL AVIV (AP) — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu suggested Monday that his tough stance on peace talks with Syria was just an opening position.

At a news conference in Jerusalem, Netanyahu refused to say how much of the Golan Heights, if any, he was prepared to give back to Syria in return for peace.

Netanyahu has said in the past that Israel would have to keep most of the strategic plateau for security reasons.

"I tend to negotiate with my Arab counterparts in the way they negotiate with me," he said. "They pretty much demand everything and so do I, and the negotiations end up producing a better result for Israel because of this, so I'm not going to stake out negotiating positions."

Netanyahu's defence

minister, Moshe Arens, meanwhile, spoke sharply about Syria's role in neighbouring Lebanon.

Arens said Lebanon was a Syrian puppet and that Syria, which has 35,000 troops in Lebanon, is responsible for the activities of the Shiite Muslim guerrilla group Hizbollah which is fighting Israeli forces in south Lebanon.

"The country of Lebanon is a non-country. It's a puppet state," Arens told a visiting delegation of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations. "The decisions as to what happens in Lebanon are taken in one place only, in Damascus."

Israel occupies a strip of land in south Lebanon to protect its northern border against attacks by Hizbollah. Israeli troop casualties have mounted in the past year, leading to increasing

public pressure in Israel for a unilateral troop withdrawal.

The Israeli government has offered to withdraw its forces from Lebanon in return for a promise from the Beirut government that the Lebanese army enter the southern area and prevent attacks on the Israeli border.

Lebanon refused and Israeli commentators said this was because Syrian President Hafez Assad views the Israeli troop losses in Lebanon as a means of putting pressure on Israel to give up the Golan.

Netanyahu said Monday that he was confident he could make peace with Syria, Lebanon and the Palestinians if re-elected May 17.

He said he believed he would win the elections and would "complete the circle of peace around us, with the

Palestinians and we believe with the Syrians and the Lebanese."

Peace negotiations between Israel and Syria broke off in 1996. Syria maintains that during the talks the late Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin promised to return the entire Golan, in return for a peace treaty.

Syria demands that the present Israeli government accept this as a condition for resumption of the negotiations.

Netanyahu refuses and insists that the talks be resumed without preconditions. "I hope that Syria will relax some very stringent starting conditions that it has put on the negotiations which have so far blocked the resumption of these talks," he said Monday.



Kurd protesters chant anti-U.S. and Israel slogans Monday in the streets of the southeastern port city of Marseille during a demonstration by about a thousand people against the arrest of Kurdish Labour Party (PKK) leader, Abdullah Ocalan (AFP photo)

Yemen denies link between suspects and Ben Laden

ABU DHABI (R) — A senior Yemeni official said in remarks published on Monday that Yemeni groups on trial in the Arab state on charges of sabotage were not linked to Saudi dissident Osama Ben Laden.

"Ben Laden had no relationships with anyone in Yemen," Al Imhad daily quoted Yemen's Deputy Prime Minister Abdul Qader Bagammal as saying.

"Those who spread such reports know they are not correct," he said.

Five suspects, members of the little known Aden Abyan Islamic Army, are facing trial for kidnapping 16 Western tourists in Yemen in December. Four hostages — three Britons and an Australian — were killed when Yemeni security forces stormed the kidnappers' hideout.

The group's self-confessed leader, Zain Al Abideen Al Mehdar, admitted in court on Thursday to possessing a number of items including articles on developments in Afghanistan and photographs of Ben Laden. Ben Laden has been indicted in the U.S. for masterminding last August's bombing of U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, which killed 239 people.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Algeria says still excavating grave

ALGIERS (R) — Algerian authorities said on Monday that rescue workers were still excavating a suspected mass grave near Algiers but had not yet found the remains of any bodies in it. The authorities were reacting to a report by the local daily Liberté, which said on Sunday that government rescue workers had removed the remains of at least 70 people from a mass grave in Ouled Aïel town, 20 km south of central Algiers.

Turks shut border gate with Iran

DIYARBAKIR (R) — Turkey closed one of its border crossings with eastern neighbour Iran on Monday because of protests there against the capture of Kurdish rebel chief Abdullah Ocalan. Ocalan's seizure by Turkish special forces last week sparked Kurdish demonstrations in Iran, as well as in Western Europe and other parts of the world.

'Ethiopian bombing kills four'

ASMARA (AFP) — Four civilians were killed at the weekend when Ethiopian warplanes bombed Eritrean villages near Tisorona, on the central front of the neighbouring states' border war, the Eritrean News Agency reported Monday. The agency, Erina, said the bombing raid was undertaken by Russian-built Antonovs and came around 9:00 p.m. (1800 GMT) on Sunday.

U.S. discusses military cooperation with Qatar

DOHA (AP) — General Henry H. Shelton, chairman of the U.S. joint chiefs of staff, discussed military cooperation Monday with Qatar's crown prince, Sheikh Jassem Ben Hamad Al Thani, the official Qatar News Agency reported. It said the two talked about increasing cooperation in the talks, which also were attended by senior Qatari military officials.

Iran says more suspects arrested in killings

TEHRAN (AP) — Iranian authorities have arrested four more suspects in connection with the deaths of five dissidents late last year, a military prosecutor said Monday. The prosecutor, Mohammad Niyazi, told Tehran Radio that one of the suspects was a businessman who had fled to Turkey but was brought back with the help of Turkish authorities.

British-Saudi arms contract takes economic conditions 'into account'

LONDON (AFP) — Britain said Monday that its massive, long-term arms contract with Saudi Arabia "takes into account" economic conditions in the oil-rich kingdom, but repeated that it remained "committed" to the deal.

The British defence ministry said that since the programme was launched in 1985, there's been a regular dialogue with the Saudi government to take into account the prevailing economic conditions.

"That includes such issues as the price of oil," However, "both British and Saudi governments are completely committed to delivery of the supplies and services that have been previously agreed under the contract," a spokesman for the ministry of defence told AFP.

Diplomats in Saudi Arabia, who asked not to be identified, said last week that the multi-billion-pound deal known as Al Yamamah, had been "frozen" because of Saudi difficulties in meeting payments at a time of rock-bottom oil prices.

On Monday, the diplomatic sources said that Saudi Arabia was "rescheduling" the deal. Like the British government, lead contractor British Aerospace has denied that the programme is being put on hold.

"Any suggestion around the programme being

frozen is just not our understanding. Nor is it that of the British government," the group said last week.

The Saudi defence ministry assistant for civil aviation, Fahd Ben Abdullah, was quoted in the Saudi press Monday as saying that "the Al Yamamah project has not been cancelled despite the fall in oil prices."

The initial report claiming difficulties in the contract sent shares plunging. Monday, the share traded 14 pence higher at 416 pence Monday, although this remained lower than the opening price of 430 pence on Thursday before the original report.

Neither Britain nor Saudi Arabia will reveal the details of what has been billed as the world's biggest arms deal. Unconfirmed reports have spoken of more than \$20 billion with a 25 per cent off-set programme.

Al Yamamah, signed by Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in September 1985 and since updated, has reportedly seen more than 120 Tornado fighter jets, dozens of Hawk trainers and tanks delivered to the kingdom.

Defence sources say that although the bulk of the deal has gone through very large sums are still involved.

Israeli women face political glass ceiling

TEL AVIV (R) — When rumour spread that cabinet member Limor Livnat could challenge Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for control of the right-wing Likud Party, one lawmaker called her an "excellent minister."

"But Likud's potential voters... won't vote for her, if only because she's a woman," said fellow Likud member of parliament Gideon Ezra, referring to Livnat, Israel's communications minister.

Only the sixth female cabinet minister in Israel's 50-year history, Livnat helped free up the telecommunications market and earned a reputation as one of the most effective members of Netanyahu's cabinet.

But lacking a power base, she decided not to take on Netanyahu in the run-up to Israel's May general election.

Despite opinion polls that show the Israeli public wants more women in politics, there are only nine in the 120-member parliament.

A quarter of a century after Prime Minister Golda Meir

the woman the Jewish state's founding father David Ben-Gurion once called "the only man in my cabinet," left office, Israeli women politicians seem to be trapped under a glass ceiling.

In security-conscious Israel, women have a hard time competing with well-known former generals who advance on the political battlefield.

"I've been saying for years that we are like the South American countries that were ruled by generals, the only difference is that we elect them democratically," said Alice Shalvi, founder of the Israel Women's Network lobbying group.

"As long as the security issue is so central, the generals are going to have their advantage, unfortunately," she said.

The patriarchal nature of Jewish society, say activists, has also hindered the advancement of women in politics as it has in business and the military. The bad and the good news women's political representation in Israel has never

been as strong as it was in the 1950s, a golden era of sorts that feminists look back on nostalgically.

In 1955, women made up 10 per cent of the Knesset, the highest percentage ever. In 1956, Israel elected its first female mayor — and its last — until 1998 when two cities chose women mayors.

In those elections the number of women on local and municipal councils soared by 40 per cent from 164 to 250. Many activists perceived the rise, and the election of the two mayors, as a symbol of a spreading feminist consciousness.

Courses that aim to help women prepare for political life have become increasingly popular over the past decade, said Esther Herzog head of a new women's party called "Yesh," an acronym in Hebrew for "equal representation."

She lauded the success of women in the municipal elections but said they would still fail to win seats on the national level because "they are not

organised as a sector."

Several new female faces are competing in the May poll. Foremost among them is 44-year-old Pinna Rosenblum, arguably Israel's most talked about celebrity, who is running as the head of a party in her name.

The country's top model through her teens and 20s, and its leading cosmetics entrepreneur in her 30s and early 40s, Rosenblum has called on women "to change their world view and unite around a woman" like her.

But while analysts say Rosenblum may have a shot at a parliamentary seat or two, the more pressing question for women is what will happen in the larger parties, including a new centrist list led by former Defence Minister Yitzhak Mordechai.

A huge billboard with four larger-than-life photos of the party's leaders, Mordechai, former Chief of Staff Amnon Lipkin-Shahak, and Likud defectors Dan Meridor and Roni Milo irked some women.

JORDAN TELEVISION

PROGRAMME TWO

19:10 News headlines

19:35 Doc. — Perspective

20:00 News in Arabic (Channel 2 links up with channel 1)

20:30 Programme on the late His Majesty King Hussein

21:00 Islamic History in Jordan

21:30 On the Banks of Jordan

22:00 News in English

22:10 Doc. — National Geographic

23:00 News in Arabic (Channel 2 links up with channel 1)

PRAYER TIMES

04:49 Fajr

06:07 Sunrise Doha

11:49 Dhuhr

15:01 Asr

17:31 Maghrib

18:49 Isha

CHURCHES

St. Mary of Nazareth Church Sweflich, Tel. 5920740

Assemblies of God Church Tel. 4632785

St. Joseph Church Tel. 4624590

Terra Sancta Church Tel. 4622366

Anglican Church Tel. 4624853/4624811

St. Afrem Syrian Orthodox Church Tel. 4771751

Amman International Church Tel. 5865897

German-speaking Evangelical Congregation Tel. 5688404

The Evangelical Local Church in Amman Tel. 5811295

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Tel. 4654932

St. John the Baptist at De la Salle College Tel. 5661757

Church of the Annunciation Tel. 4637440

Greek Orthodox Church Tel. 4646138

Church of Presentation, Sweifich Tel. 5920146

The United Catholic Church Tel. 4624757

The English-Language Catholic Parish Tel. 4614190

Evangelical Free Church Tel. 4892679

The Baptist Church Tel. 4628052

The Armenian Catholic Church Tel. 4771331

The American Orthodox Church Tel. 4775261

WEATHER

Bulletin supplied by the Department of Meteorology

It will be moderate, sunny, with temperatures rising slightly, and winds southeasterly light to moderate. In Aqaba, winds will be northerly moderate and seas

JORDAN TIMES DAILY GUIDE AND CALENDAR

calm.

Amman 02/17

Aqaba 08/22

Deserts -1/17

Jordan Valley 09/23

Yesterday's high temperatures:

Amman 15, Aqaba 20 Humidity readings: Amman 26 per cent, Aqaba 32 per cent.

Following are the temperatures expected today in the following areas:

Ajlun 00/11

Jerash 05/18

Um Qays 03/17

Madaba 01/16

Petra 00/17

Dead Sea 09/25

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS NIGHT DUTY

AMMAN:

Dr. Awad Hawamdeh 5332350

Dr. Tawfiq Qub'ain 4623029

Dr. Ghalib Zawaideh 4126011

Dr. Khalidoun Asfour 5332600

AMMAN:

Firas Pharmacy 5661912

Al Salam Pharmacy 4636730

Mayadah Pharmacy 5537004

Rukn Al Dawa Pharmacy 5536169

IRBID:

Dr. Ali Shuqari 02/7100069

Fou'ad Pharmacy 02/73560

ZARQA:

Dr. Akram Haddad 05/983550

Palestine Pharmacy 05/983562

EMERGENCIES

Food Control Centre 4637111

Civil Defence Department 5661111

Civil Defence Immediate Rescue 4630341

Civil Defence Emergency 199

Rescue Police, 192, 4621111, 4637777

Fire Brigade 4617101

Blood Bank 4775121

Highway Police 5343402

Traffic Police 4896390

Public Security Dept. 4630321

Hotel Complaints 5605800

Price Complaints 5661176

Water & Sewerage Complaints 4897467

Amman Municipality Complaints 4787111

Telephone Information (directory assistance) 121

Overseas Calls 0132

Central Amman Telephone Repairs 4623101

Abdali Tel. Repairs 5661101

Jordan Television 4773111

Radio Jordan 4774111

Water Authority 5680100

J. Electricity Authority 5815615

Electric Power Co. 4636381

RJ Flight Information 44-53200

Queen Alia Intl. Airport 44-53200

HOSPITALS

AMMAN:

The Arab Centre for Heart and Special Surgery 5921199

The Islamic, Abdli 5666131/7

Hussein Medical Centre 5856856

Luzma 4630195

Khalidi Maternity 4644281/6

Akileh Maternity 4642441/2

Jabal Amman Maternity 4642362

Malhas, J. Amman 4636140

Palestine, Shmeisani 5607731

Shmeisani Hospital 5607431

Jordan Hospital 5607550

University Hospital 5353444

Al-Muasher Hospital 5667271/9

Al-Ahli, Abdli 5664164/6

Italian, Al-Muhsheen 4777101/3

Al-Bashir 4775111/26

Army, Marka 4891611/5

Queen Alia Hospital 5157100

Arnal Hospital 5607155

Al Arnal Cancer Centre 5353000

ZARQA:

Zarqa Govt. Hospital (09)983323

Zarqa National Hospital. (09)900560

Ibn Sina Hospital (09)986731

Al Hikma Modern Hospital (09)990990

IRBID:

Princess Baena Hospital (02)75555

Roman Catholic Hospital (02)727275

Ibn Al Nafes Hospital (02)7101372, (02)7103101

Rosary Sisters Hospital (02)7102831, (02)7102011

Speciality Hospital (02)7103100

AQABA:

Princess Haya Hospital (03)2040111

FOR THE TRAVELLER QUEEN ALIA AIRPORT

This information is supplied by Royal Jordanian (RJ) information department at the Queen Alia International Airport Tel. (44)53200-5, where it should always be verified. Information on other flights can be supplied on phone 44 (52700). Information on Royal Wings flights can be supplied on phone 4875201-5

ARRIVALS

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights

07:15 Saras (RJ)

07:30 Damascus (RJ)

09:50 Tehran, Abu Dhabi (RJ)

10:05 Muscat, Dubai (RJ)

10:15 Doha, Bahrain (RJ)

16:20 Cairo (RJ)

17:30 London, Frankfurt (RJ)

18:30 Chicago, Shannon (RJ)

Other Flights

12:30 Aden (TY)

14:35 Istanbul (TK)

18:00 Dubai, Damascus (EK)

18:45 Beirut (ME)

19:05 Kiev (EU)

20:25 Paris (AF)

20:25 Tel Aviv (LY)

22:25 Cairo (MS)

23:35 London, Damascus (BA)

23:35 Amsterdam (KL)

23:55 Larnaca (CY)

00:55 Bucharest (RO)

02:00 Rome (AZ)

Royal Wings (RW) Flights

07:25 Aqaba (arriving at QAIA) (RW)

08:50 Aqaba (arriving at QAIA) (RW)

09:50 Aqaba (arriving at Marka Airport) (RW)

16:00 Aqaba (arriving at Marka Airport) (RW)

18:45 Tel Aviv (arriving at QAIA) (RW)

DEPARTURES

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights

08:25 Amsterdam, New York (RJ)

11:30 Vienna, Frankfurt (RJ)

12:00 Geneva, Madrid (RJ)

12:10 Brussels, Paris (RJ)

12:15 London (RJ)

12:30 Cairo (RJ)

20:30 Beirut, Damascus (RJ)

20:30 Jeddah (RJ)

23:59 Abu Dhabi, Dubai (RJ)

Other Flights

07:10 Frankfurt (LH)

13:30 Aden (TY)

15:35 Istanbul (TK)

19:00 Dubai (EK)

19:40 Kiev (EU)

20:00 Beirut (ME)

21:10 Tel Aviv (LY)

21:40 Cairo (MS)

00:35 Amsterdam (KL)

01:55 Bucharest (RO)

03:00 Rome (AZ)

Royal Wings (RW) Flights

05:00 Aqaba (from QAIA) (RW)

08:30 Aqaba (from Marka Airport) (RW)

16:30 Tel Aviv (from Marka Airport) (RW)

20:30 Aqaba (from QAIA) (RW)

01:55 Bucharest (RO)

03:00 Rome (AZ)

Royal Wings (RW) Flights

05:00 Aqaba (from QAIA) (RW)

08:30 Aqaba (from Marka Airport) (RW)

16:30 Tel Aviv (from Marka Airport) (RW)

20:30 Aqaba (from QAIA) (RW)

Queen re

Her Majesty Queen Rania of Jordan arrived in London on Monday for a three-day visit. The Queen will be accompanied by Prince Al Hussein and Princess Al Fawzan. The visit is part of a series of engagements in the UK, including a meeting with the Prime Minister and a performance at the Royal Albert Hall.

The Queen's visit to the UK is highly anticipated, as it marks the first time she has visited since her wedding to Prince Al Hussein in 1993. The Queen is expected to spend most of her time in London, with a brief stop in Manchester.

Bri

PM gives press conference

Saudi delegation

Amended trade by Upper

Majali stresses role

Ministry

By Dana Charkasi

AMMAN — The Ministry of Agriculture said Monday it had launched a nationwide vaccination campaign against the dangerous and often fatal foot-and-mouth disease that has hit many cloven-footed livestock because of drought.

Officials said the ministry will start a census to determine how many of the country's sheep, goats and cattle have been affected with the highly contagious disease which is enzootic constantly present in a locality in the Middle East.

They said Jordan, struggling hard to cope with the sudden outbreak of the disease, exacerbated by lack of rainfall, had ordered one million vaccination doses from Turkey.

"Half of the shots have arrived from Turkey, and the rest will come soon," Agriculture Minister Mijhem Khreisna said.

Queen receives senators, deputies

AMMAN (J.T.) — Her Majesty Queen Noor on Monday received the members of the Upper and Lower Houses of Parliament at Bab Al Salam.

Queen Noor, who was very moved and comforted by their visit, expressed His Majesty King Hussein's appreciation and pride in the people's representatives, their hard work and the democratic process in Jordan.

The Queen said that she and the Hashemite Royal Family were very proud of their achievements, adding that they will be a source of strength and support for His Majesty King Abdullah.

With Queen Noor were HRH Prince Hashem, the Speaker of the Upper House Zeid Rifai and Deputy Speaker of the Lower House Bassam Haddadin.



Her Majesty Queen Noor on Monday receives Senator Ahmad Obaidat at Bab Al Salam, where members of both Houses came to offer condolences. Here, also, HRH Prince Hashem receives Senator Mudar Badran (photo by Yousef 'Allan)

Briefs

PM gives press conference today

AMMAN (Petra) — Prime Minister Faysal Tarawneh today meets with representatives of local, Arab and international media at Hussein Youth City.

Saudi delegation visits PSD

AMMAN (Petra) — Director of the Public Security Department (PSD) Nasouh Muhieddin received a Saudi delegation representing the ministries of Interior and Labour and Social Affairs. The delegation, which is headed by assistant director of prisoners affairs department at the Interior Ministry visited the Reform and Rehabilitation Centres Department and were briefed on its duties by its Director Brigadier General Sami Al Majali. The delegation also visited the Family Protection Unit at the Amman Police Department and Juweideh Reform and Rehabilitation Centre.

Amended trade law endorsed by Upper House

AMMAN (Petra) — The Upper House of Parliament endorsed the provisional trade licences law No. 2 for the year 1979 after making amendments thereto. The House, meeting under its President Zeid Rifai, rejected the provisional law No. 33 for the year 1989, and the provisional law for 1998, whose provisions have been included in the provisional law No. 2. The House also approved the draft electricity law for the year 1997 which was passed to it by the Lower House. It also approved a recommendation made by a Joint Legal Affairs/ Finance and Economic Committee, providing for retaining a high percentage of investment, i.e. no less than 30 per cent of the country's gross domestic product (GDP) in order for economic growth to reach aspired levels.

Majali stresses role of Arab Parliaments

VIENNA (Petra) — Speaker of the Lower House of Parliament Abdul Hadi Al Majali Monday stressed the important role Arab parliaments can play in the forthcoming International Conference for Speakers of International Parliaments, due to be held at the United Nations Headquarters next year. Majali, who is currently attending an International Preparatory Committee meeting held here, to prepare for the New York Meeting of World Parliaments Speakers, said the New York meeting is aimed at finding the necessary mechanism to boost the role of the International Parliamentary Union (IPU) in dealing with regional and international issues. Majali welcomed the IPU's meeting in Amman in April next year, voicing hope that the meeting will provide an opportunity for parliamentarians from around the world to get first-hand information on regional issues and problems.

Jordanian-Iraqi joint committee to conclude new trade protocol Thursday

AMMAN (J.T.) — The Jordanian-Iraqi joint committee is scheduled to meet in Baghdad on Thursday to conclude a new trade protocol for 1999.

The Ministry of Industry and Trade said Monday that the new protocol will be worth \$200 million down from \$255 million in 1998 due to the drop in oil prices on the international market.

Jordan, which imports its oil and oil products from Iraq with approval from the U.N. Sanctions Committee, had agreed with Iraq last month to reduce the volume of goods and services in the 1999 trade protocol in view of the declined oil prices.

Iraqi Minister of Trade Mohammad Mehdi Saleh, who was in Amman Saturday, said then that despite the recent reduction in the trade volume, his country was keen to enhance trade with Jordan. Saleh told a meeting of Jordanian industrialists

here that Baghdad was considering increasing its imports of Jordanian vegetable oil in line with the oil-for-food agreement it signed with the U.N. in December 1997. That deal allows Iraq to export \$2 billion worth of oil in exchange for food and medicine. The oil sale volume has since been increased to \$5.2 billion.

Thursday's meeting will be co-chaired by Minister of Industry and Trade Mohammad Saleh Hourani and Saleh, and attended by Jordanian industrialists and business community representatives.

Iraq is the largest importer of Jordanian goods among the Arab states, and in 1998 Jordanian industrialists sold to Iraqi markets national products worth JD138 million compared to JD96 million in 1997.

The bulk of Jordanian exports were vegetable oil, soap, medicine and medical supplies, and chemical detergents.

Save water...

Every drop counts!

Israel makes about-turn on decision to allow examination of prisoners

By Caroline Faraj

AMMAN — Israel has reneged on its earlier decision to let a group of doctors chosen by the Jordan Medical Association (JMA) examine 14 Jordanian prisoners held in Israeli jails, a senior official said Monday.

"The Israeli authorities informed us earlier this month about changing their former position which would have allowed five doctors nominated by the JMA to examine the Jordanian prisoners who are presumed ill," Jordanian Ambassador to Israel Omar Rifai told the Jordan Times on Monday.

On Jan. 7 Israel gave its verbal approval to Rifai regarding the list of doctors proposed by the JMA. That list included five doctors living in Arab East Jerusalem.

Reaction to the Israeli decision to renege has aroused anger from the JMA.

"If Israel is playing politics, we will have nothing to do with it," JMA President Bassam Dajani told the Jordan Times on Monday.

"But if Israel deals with the issue from a humanitarian perspective, then our doctors who live in the West Bank will be available," Dajani added.

Observers said the Israeli authorities are trying to force the association's hand into normalising with the Jewish state.

"The JMA's decision to send a team of doctors on a purely humanitarian mission to examine the Jordanian prisoners, posed the toughest test yet to their determination to fight normalisation," said one observer.

The JMA, a stronghold of anti-normalisation with Israel, together with 12 other professional unions, has threatened to expel any of its members who either visit Israel or conduct activities with the Jewish state.

In November, the Jordanian embassy obtained Israeli approval to send physicians to examine the prisoners, many of them said to be suffering from serious psychological and health problems.

"I think we are back to square one," Rifai said yesterday. He said that although finding doctors to carry out the examinations is

easy, specially among the Arab Israeli doctors living in Israel, it is preferable to have Jordanian doctors examining the Jordanian prisoners."

"It is up to the JMA to state their final position," Rifai said.

The issue of examining the Jordanian prisoners in the Israeli jails was raised after a visit on Oct. 20 by family members of 12 prisoners held in the Jewish state.

The visit was the first to be approved by the Israeli government under the 1994 Jordanian-Israeli peace treaty.

The families had said the prisoners were suffering from serious health problems and urged the government to do its utmost to secure their release.

In a statement they issued then, the families said: "All the prisoners suffer from deteriorating psychological and health conditions as a result of their prolonged and unjustified detention and poor living conditions."

The prisoners had been held in two jails in Shata and Nafha before their recent transfer to the Ashkelon prison in south-

ern Israel upon a request by the Jordanian authorities.

In the past four years, Tel Aviv freed more than 20 Jordanian prisoners who were caught infiltrating Israel or were jailed because of alleged affiliation with banned Palestinian groups.

Israel says the remaining 14 prisoners were convicted of serious offences, such as fatal attacks on Israelis. The Jewish state insists that they spend their prison terms in Israel, while Jordan is seeking their handover to Jordanian custody.

However, informed sources said that "in addition to the 14 Jordanians imprisoned on security charges, there are six more held in Israel on criminal offences."

Israel freed most Jordanian prisoners in its jails more than one year ago in exchange for two Mossad agents who attempted to assassinate Khaled Misha'al, a leading member of the Islamic Resistance Movement, Hamas, in Amman in 1997.

Workshop for tourism personnel opens in expectation of Millennium tourism boom

AMMAN (Petra) — Specialists gathered here yesterday for a workshop on training of personnel for the Kingdom's expected boom in its tourism sector come the year 2000.

Addressing the participants, Minister of Tourism and Antiquities Akel Biltaji said Jordan, which now has 210 hotels with 11,500 rooms and 22,000 beds, is working on boosting its tourism industry through ambitious plans and training programmes to modernise its tourism-related facilities, mainly its hotels.

According to Biltaji, current investment in the tourism sector accounts for 44 per cent of the overall volume of investment in the Kingdom.

The workshop participants are looking at and discussing Jordan's policy in training personnel in the hotel services.

The focus was on Swiss government assistance to the Kingdom in training 90 teachers employed by the Ministry of Education in government schools.

The training is being conducted at the vocational training corporation's centres in Jordan and at the Higher Institute for Hotel Training in Tunisia in cooperation with the Swiss agency.



Jordan has 210 hotels with 11,500 rooms and 22,000 beds to accommodate tourists (file photo)

Ministry of Agriculture to undertake census over foot-and-mouth disease

Drought exacerbates spread

By Dana Charkasi

AMMAN — The Ministry of Agriculture said Monday it had launched a nationwide vaccination campaign against the dangerous and often fatal foot-and-mouth disease that has hit many cloven-footed livestock because of drought.

Officials said the ministry will start a census to determine how many of the country's sheep, goats and cattle have been afflicted with the highly-contagious disease which is enzootic (constantly present in a locality) in the Middle East.

They said Jordan, struggling hard to cope with the sudden outbreak of the disease, exacerbated by lack of rainfall, had ordered one million vaccination doses from Turkey.

"Half of the shots have arrived from Turkey, and the rest will come soon," Agriculture Minister Mijhem Khreisha said

during a regular Lower House of Parliament session late Sunday.

He said Jordan had to import from Turkey "after all our supplies against this disease were consumed."

Khreisha, responding to deputies' complaints that scores of livestock had died recently because of polluted animal feed, said tests conducted on barley and other animal fodder stored at the country's main warehouse showed the supplies were safe.

"On the contrary, it was proven to us that the foot-and-mouth (also called hoof-and-mouth) disease had hit the country."

Officials said drought, brought about by scarce winter rainfall, had eliminated vast pastures and with them vital animal feed, which in turn weakened the animal's resistance to the disease.

A local agriculturist said that illegal crossing of borders between Jordan and Syria, and Jordan

and Iraq of grazing livestock has also exposed animals to the disease. Syria, last November, suffered an outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease among its herds, added the agriculturist.

"The disease might affect the quality of milk and meat products from ill animals, but it would still be safe for consumption by human beings," head of the ministry's Livestock and Range Land Administration, Mukhlis Amarin, stressed.

The government, which has forecast \$150 million in losses because of the drought, has appealed for food aid to assist farmers and impoverished Jordanians. It has also allocated JD12 million in interest-free loans to assist farmers.

"The planned census will enable the government to reach these farmers and offer them the needed help," said one official.

Foot-and-mouth disease

only affects humans if they have a wound or abrasion and are in direct and steady contact with infected animals.

"But it is not at all a serious condition for mankind," said Amarin.

The disease, doctors say, does not usually pose a great problem to grown up animals, but might be fatal to the newborn as they do not have a strong immune system yet.

Symptoms of the disease are observed in the mouth and the hooves of animals, hence the name.

Blisters and ulcers will appear inside the mouth along with silver-shining foamy saliva (the disease is also known as 'silver line') that might drool down the animal's mouth.

Blisters will appear in and between the hooves and the horn material of the hooves will split.

Veterinarians say proper vaccination is the only cure.

Amarin said the ministry regularly carries out

routine compulsory vaccinations for 60,000 heads of cattle every year.

It also conducts the so-called "ring-vaccinations" for sheep and other cattle every time there is a breakout of the disease. Under this method, all animals in the affected area will be vaccinated, even in neighbourhoods that have not been hit by the disease.

"Normally, we buy between 300,000 and 350,000 doses of vaccines every year," Amarin said.

The disease can easily spread in densely-populated and non-hygienic stables with animals suffering from lack of space and poor ventilation.

"In such a climate, the disease can flare up and strike animals much harder than usual," Amarin added.

The disease has hit hardest in Jordan's north and in the Badia region which covers half of the country.



Cows and other livestock have been afflicted with foot-and-mouth disease which is highly-contagious and enzootic (constantly present in a locality) in the Middle East (file photo)

Amarin said the ministry had set up a "coordination unit" in the northern Badia region to pool the efforts of all agricultural departments in the area — including Mafrqa, Zarqa, north Badia, Safawi, and Azraq.

Six mobile clinics are taking part in the vaccination drive, backed up by veterinarians and stock inspectors.

Any farmer in Jordan who suspects or fears that his livestock might have or will develop foot-and-mouth disease can have

his animals vaccinated against the disease for free.

The government has also cut the prices of fodder sold to livestock farmers and is offering them free water to help their animals.

Rambouillet talks divide Western allies

RAMBOUILLET, France (AP) — Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic's tough tactics have pushed the Kosovo peace talks to the brink of collapse, driving a wedge between Western allies and poisoning prospects for agreement.

U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright returned here Monday to push the belligerents hard to make a deal, with just one day left before the latest deadline of 3 p.m. (1400 GMT) Tuesday.

Albright's press secretary, James P. Rubin, said she had telephone conversations with NATO Secretary-General Javier Solana, Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov, Albanian officials in Tirana and planned to call President Bill Clinton, but he reported no progress in the talks Monday.

The phone calls, he said, were to work up support for "the emerging agreement" of the Kosovo Albanians. Their demand for a referendum on independence was still the major sticking point, he said. "Kosovo Albanians continue to move forward towards an agreement," Rubin said. "The Serbs are not engaged seriously on the military part, which is an integral part of the agreement."

Serbian President Milan Milutinovic said Sunday Belgrade will reject any foreign troops in Kosovo as part of a three-year interim

agreement with the ethnic Albanians, who make up 90 per cent of Kosovo's population.

That attitude threatens to be the deal-breaker and could result in NATO airstrikes on Serbia.

Serbian negotiators say they are prepared to sign a deal giving Kosovo Albanians wide autonomy, but they refuse a military annex to the agreement that calls for up to 30,000 NATO troops to implement the deal.

"The Serbian side believes it can have half a deal," said Albright. "There are not two documents. There is one document with two parts to it." The state-run Tanjug news agency quoted Milutinovic as standing firm.

"Our delegation will not in any form agree to the deployment of any kind of foreign troops on the territory of Yugoslavia," he was quoted as saying, reflecting the views of the top man, Milosevic. "That is our final stand."

An estimated 2,000 people have died and hundreds of thousands have been driven from their homes in Kosovo over the past year.

"If we have a yes from both sides, we will have an implementation force," Albright said.

"If the talks crater because the Serbs do not say yes, we will have bombing. If the talks crater because the Albanians have not said yes,



A group of Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) guerrillas sing and wave on top of a truck as they leave the battlefield 30 km northeast of the regional capital Pristina. Heavy fighting broke out between KLA and Yugoslav forces in northern Kosovo Monday forcing thousands of ethnic Albanians to flee their homes (Reuters photo)

we will not be able to support them and in fact will have to cut off whatever help they are getting from the outside.

"If it fails because both parties say no, there will not be bombing of Serbia and we will try to figure out ways to continue trying to deal with both sides."

Jakup Krasniqi, a senior Kosovo Liberation Army official and member of the ethnic Albanian delegation here, said in an interview distributed Sunday the ethnic Albanians will not sign an agreement unless it

includes NATO.

The crafty Milosevic has succeeded in splitting the six-nation Contact Group — the United States, Russia, Britain, France, Germany and Italy — over the past two weeks of talks, making prospects for reaching a deal even dimmer.

Russia has been noncommittal about NATO troops and has adamantly opposed conducting punitive airstrikes on Serbia, its old ally. Now the other Europeans, less convinced than the Americans that Serbia is the sole bad guy in

the talks, are having second thoughts.

"At the moment we have on the Belgrade side a government that is accepting the constitutional settlement for a self-governing Kosovo, but we don't have the Kosovo side that is doing so," Cook said in a British Broadcasting Corp. interview.

"In that context, airstrikes on Belgrade are not going to help," Yugoslav government-controlled media presented the decision to extend the deadline as a triumph for Belgrade.

"Discord in the Contact Group," said the headline on the state-controlled newspaper Politika.

The 15-nation European Union added its pressure on the Serbs Monday, saying the EU is ready to lift trade and other sanctions against Yugoslavia gradually if a deal is reached.

These sanctions include an arms embargo, a ban on new investments and travel visas for Yugoslav government officials, a freezing of Yugoslav assets abroad and a ban on commercial flights to and from Yugoslavia.

Serb police rough up two peace officials in Kosovo

PRISTINA, Yugoslavia (AP) — Two unarmed peace monitors were assaulted by Serbian policemen in Kosovo, but were not seriously hurt, the international peace mission in the Yugoslav province said Monday.

With the deadline approaching for agreement in Kosovo peace talks, the monitors — from Lithuania and Luxembourg — were on their regular patrol in the Serbian province late Sunday, observing Yugoslav troop movements, said Jorgen Grunnet, spokesman for the Organisation for Cooperation and Security in Europe that runs the mission of monitors.

The two policemen confronted them and after a brief argument "roughed up" the observers, said Grunnet.

The OSCE Kosovo verification mission considers this "aggressive behaviour on the part of the police ... a serious case of indiscipline" and a strong protest was sent to the authorities, he added.

The two peace verifiers were "a bit shaken but not seriously hurt," the spokesman said. The incident occurred some 32 kilometres north of capital Pristina. Names of the assaulted peace workers were not immediately available.

The observed movement of Yugoslav army troops has somewhat intensified over the last days, Grunnet said, apparently "a general show of alertness."

The army has been under threat of NATO strikes if the country rejects a peace deal for Kosovo, currently

negotiated in France, that would give broad autonomy to the province and allow deployment of NATO forces here.

Grunnet said the police also harassed an unspecified number of other OSCE personnel, when they were entering the country from neighbouring Macedonia Sunday. The Yugoslav border authorities insisted on searching their vehicles which, Grunnet said, was against an international convention on treatment of the peace officials.

Early Monday, the police checked the identities of a number of locally hired OSCE employees, apparently ethnic Albanians, who were aboard an OSCE bus taking them to work in the mission's headquarters in Pristina. Grunnet said this was also against the rules.

ASEM host Germany bars Spratlys dispute from agenda

MANILA (AFP) — Germany, which hosts a meeting of Asian and European foreign ministers next month, has opposed putting a territorial dispute between the Philippines and China on the agenda, a Filipino diplomat said Monday.

Antonio Rodriguez, Philippine charge d'affaires in Bonn, reported to the department of foreign affairs here Germany's position on the dispute over a reef in the South China Sea's Spratlys Island chain.

Rodriguez said he had met with the German foreign ministry's head of Southeast Asian and Pacific Affairs, Jurgen Staks, ahead of the March 29 Asia-Europe meeting (ASEM) in Berlin.

"Mr. Staks informed that there was a very real threat from the (Chinese) side that if the South China Sea issue

(was) raised, the Chinese foreign minister will walk out of the meeting," the envoy said in his formal report.

"With the Chinese 'veto', this effectively meant that the South China Sea as an agenda item was a 'dead duck'," he said, adding ASEM also works on a system of consensus among all 25 members.

Philippine Undersecretary Lauro Baja told reporters however that Manila will still push for the subject's inclusion.

"When we bring in the South China Sea, we will not do it in a confrontational manner which will disrupt the proceedings," said Baja, who directed Rodriguez to meet with a higher German official to confirm Staks's statements.

Ties between China and the Philippines have been strained after Manila

accused Beijing last year of expanding permanent structures on Mischief Reef, which Manila claims is within its 200-mile exclusive economic zone as defined by a U.N. convention.

The reef lies within the South China Sea's Spratly Island chain, believed to include vast mineral deposits and straddling vital shipping lanes.

Philippine defence officials said the structures had been completed and they appeared to be for military use rather than as fishermen's shelters as China has claimed.

ASEM, set up in 1996, brings together the foreign ministers of seven of the nine members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, as well as China, Japan and South Korea, and the 15 members of the European Union.

Russian space station welcomes likely last crew

KOROLYOV, Russia (AFP) — Russia's veteran space station welcomed what could be its last crew Monday as a trio of cosmonauts boarded the craft and prepared for a six-month mission that could conclude Mir's 13-year space Odyssey.

Frenchman Jean-Pierre Haignere, Russian Viktor Afanasyev and Slovak Ivan Bella docked their Soyuz module with the space station at 0536 GMT and hauled themselves into Mir some 90 minutes later to enthusiastic applause from space officials watching from mission control in this Moscow suburb.

The trio were greeted with the traditional Russian welcome of bread and salt proffered by the two cosmonauts who have manned Mir since last August, Gennady Padalka and Sergei Avdeyev.

"We have a long road ahead, but we are ready and I am proud," said Haignere during a 10-minute link-up with earth shortly after the crew entered the station. "It's a good symbol of cooperation."

The cosmonauts were pictured smiling during the satellite link-up as they briefed ground con-

trol. French Ambassador in Moscow Hubert Colin de Verdiere wished his compatriot well for his "this important mission."

Slovak Ambassador Roman Padan was likewise present, as were the great and good of Russia's space programme.

The three cosmonauts blasted off from Baikonur, Kazakhstan, Saturday and orbited earth at a speed of eight kilometres a second before hooking up with Mir. Bella, the first Slovak in space, will leave Mir in eight days time with Padalka, but the other three will remain on the space station conducting experiments and four space walks until the final destiny of the Orbiter is decided.

"The events of these last few days show that Russian cosmonauts continue to show their capabilities despite the difficulties," said Russian space agency chief Yuri Kopyev.

"We are working actively to find external funds but the question has not been settled yet."

Russia is desperately searching for a commercial investor to take a stake in Mir so that the craft, which costs \$250 million a year to keep in space, can remain in orbit.

If no investment is forthcoming, Haignere, Afanasyev and Avdeyev will shepherd the ageing station to a date with destiny in August, when it will be lowered into the earth's atmosphere.

Part of the craft will burn up, the remainder ditching in the Pacific Ocean the final chapter in a mishap-prone 13-year saga. The station had been only scheduled to stay up in space for five years and in the past two years has suffered a horrific run of accidents that included fires, power outages and a nearly-fatal crash with a cargo vessel.

Its main computer has shut down at least four times to leave Mir and its tenants spinning through space in total darkness.

If financing can be found and the station saved, Haignere will be relieved by a new mission on Aug. 23, after clocking up the second longest period in space for a non-Russian astronaut, with 184 days in orbit.

As Mir enters its twilight, Russia, the United States, Japan, Canada and the European space agency are all cooperating meanwhile in the construction of a new, vast orbiting laboratory — the international space station.

Thailand, Cambodia agree to demine border

PHANOM PENH, Thailand (AFP) — Thailand and Cambodia Monday announced they would cooperate to demine the border between the two countries and said they hoped for more foreign aid to back the project.

Thai Deputy Foreign Minister Sukhumbhand Paribatra and Cambodian Undersecretary of State for Foreign Affairs Khong Sam Nuon called for extra aid after signing the joint action agreement at this border village in northeastern Thailand.

The two countries issued a joint request for donor countries, international organisations and non-governmental organisations to provide technical and financial assistance for mine clearing.

"We hope assistance from foreign countries will come after this joint announcement," Sukhumbhand said.

"Landmines have killed and maimed countless innocent civilians along the Thai-Cambodia border, destroyed livelihoods and obstructed economic and social develop-

ment of the border area." The international community already provides millions of dollars a year to help Cambodia with its huge mine problem.

Most of the mines were laid by Khmer Rouge rebels who fled to the gem and timber-rich border areas after their ouster from Phnom Penh by invading Vietnamese troops in 1979.

Lesser insurgencies around Thailand's borders with Myanmar, Laos and Malaysia have also left a deadly residue of mines.

Thailand pledged to remove all mines on its borders within three years.

But Lieutenant General Vasu Chanarat, director-general of the Thai Mines Action Centre (TMAC), said the legacy of mines would keep his organisation busy for another nine years.

TMAC planned sixteen projects from this year until 2008, including vocational training and rehabilitation for mine victims.

"We need the assistance of foreign countries while we are suffering from the economic crisis. We have a limited budget to demine," Vasu said.

A 1998 army survey showed 469 square kilometres of Thailand are mined, including 205 square kilometres on the Cambodian border, 124 square kilometres on the Lao border and the remainder on the frontiers with Myanmar and Malaysia.

There are an estimated four to six million land mines in Cambodia, one of the most heavily mined countries in the world.

A Red Cross report released in October said just under 1,000 people were killed or injured by mines in Cambodia between January and September last year, 13 per cent less than the same period of 1997. There were 1,369 casualties in the whole of 1997 and 2,766 in 1996, it said.

Some 40 per cent of Cambodian landmine casualties were civilians, with most incidents happening while people were farming or collecting food.

NEWS IN BRIEF

British family doctor facing 15 murder charges

MANCHESTER, England (AFP) — A British family doctor already accused of murdering eight of his women patients was charged with seven more murders Monday, police said. Harold Shipman, 52, who practises in Hyde, near Manchester in northwest England, now faces a total of 15 murder charges. He is expected to appear before a magistrate's court later Monday. The doctor has already pleaded not guilty to four murder charges. He has formally pleaded not guilty to murdering Kathleen Grundy, 81, Winifred Mellor and Joan Melia, both 73, and 49-year-old Bianca Pomfret, who died between 1997 and 1998. A provisional trial date has been set for October.

British balloonists hit jet stream over Africa

LONDON (R) — The pilots of a British round-the-world balloon expedition Monday picked up the jet-stream winds over Africa that they hope will rocket them eastwards in their record attempt. Pilots Andy Elson, 45, and Colin Prescott, 48, plan to head towards India at up to 160 kph in their bid to be the first to circumnavigate the globe in a balloon. After nearly six days of low-level manoeuvring southwards underneath the jet stream, the balloon team ascended to 8,000 metres over Mali in west Africa. "We are now on our way," said flight director Ian Ashpole at mission control in London. "Entering the jet stream this far south has meant that we have the most favourable trajectory." The team, sponsored by British Communications Group Cable and Wireless Plc, launched Wednesday. They have already conducted two precarious sky walks to carry out repairs. Around 20 earlier attempts to fly around the world in a balloon have failed, the most recent by British tycoon Richard Branson and American Steve Fossett, who came down in the Pacific on Dec. 25 when an area of low pressure blocked their path. Cable and Wireless is expected to reach Indian airspace by Friday and then swing round the south of China. China put a ban on British balloons crossing its territory in December when Branson and Fossett accidentally drifted into a forbidden area. At least five other round-the-world attempts are being prepared.

Tortured Zimbabwe pressmen to appear in court Monday

HARARE (AFP) — Two Zimbabwean journalists who were arrested and tortured last month for reporting an alleged coup plot against President Robert Mugabe are due to appear in court Monday. They face charges of publishing false news likely to cause alarm and despondency. Editor Mark Chavunduka and reporter Ray Choto will appear before a magistrate's court for contravening a section of the law and order (maintenance) act after running a story in their independent Sunday Standard paper, which claimed that 23 Zimbabwean army officers had been arrested for plotting a military coup. The two journalists said they were severely tortured during the detention by the military and a medical doctor confirmed that they had been subjected to electric shocks and physical assault. The two are currently out of custody on bail conditions which forbid them from travelling outside the country.

Hong Kong triad suspects sought in Japan drug bust

TOKYO (R) — Japanese police said Monday they were seeking two suspected members of a Hong Kong triad crime syndicate in connection with a drug bust that netted more than 200 kg of illegal stimulants. Kyodo news agency reported. It was the first time that members of the Hong Kong triads have been implicated in large-scale smuggling of drugs into Japan, police were quoted as telling Kyodo. Kyodo reported that police and customs officials said the two were believed to have hired four Chinese nationals who were arrested on Feb. 1 on suspicion of transporting 202 kg of amphetamines to a warehouse in Chiba, just east of Tokyo, where the drugs were seized. The drugs had an estimated street value of more than 11 billion Yen (\$90 million), police were quoted as saying. Investigations revealed that one of the four was a low-ranking member of a Hong Kong triad, police told Kyodo. The stimulants were concealed in the inner wall of a container filled with computer components that was packed in the southern Chinese city of Guangzhou in mid-January and arrived in Yokohama on Jan. 20, Kyodo said. Police declined to speak to Reuters about the case.

Passengers evacuated from car ferry outside of French port

LILLE, France (AP) — About 15 passengers on a British car ferry were evacuated by helicopter early Monday after the boat broke down outside the French port of Boulogne-sur-Mer, authorities said. The car ferry, owned by the British company Falcon-Sea, was carrying a shipment of trucks to the British port of Folkestone when it broke down in heavy seas about 7:15 a.m. (0615 GMT), port authorities said. All of the passengers and several members of the crew were evacuated soon after. No injuries were reported. Authorities were waiting for the arrival of a tug boat to bring the vessel under control.

Two killed, more missing in Swiss avalanche

EVOLENE, Switzerland (AP) — Two people were killed and about 10 others were missing after two avalanches in a valley of the southern Swiss Alps, police said Monday. The avalanches hit Sunday evening between the villages of Evolene and les Hauderes, sweeping away several chalets, state police said. Two people were found dead under the snow. One girl survived with a broken leg, according to police spokesman Carlo Kuonen. The rescue operation was called off early this morning due to a high risk of further avalanches in the area about 177 kilometres from Geneva. About 10 people, inhabitants of the chalets in the area hit by the avalanche who couldn't immediately be contacted, were still missing. Some 200 people were evacuated from parts of the Val d'Herens and the upper part of the valley was closed off. Authorities told those who stayed behind in Evolene not to leave their homes.

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Pardon fo

MANILA (AFP) — Philippine
President Joseph Estrada sus-
pended the release of 50 jailed
Communists guerrillas Monday
and deplored more than 3,000
others to track down rebel units
and two other security officials.

The new people's army (npa)
and attached army Brigadier
General Victor Obillo, Captain
Edmundo Montalvo and police
chief inspector Roberto Bernal to
turn up the pressure on the gov-
ernment to restore stalled peace

"I was about to give amnesty to
about 50 political detainees but
he held it because of this inci-
dent of kidnapping," Estrada
said after the police officer was
abducted Sunday.

"After this incident that hap-
pened, we have to rethink," added
Estrada, referring to the govern-
ment's stated aim to seek a politi-

World News

South Korea to grant mass amnesty

SEOUL (AFP) — South Korea said Monday it would unconditionally free the world's longest-serving political detainee, Woo Yong-Gak, and 16 other long-term prisoners under a sweeping amnesty of nearly 9,000 people.

The country's most dramatic pardon was timed to coincide with the first anniversary in power of President Kim Dae-Jung, a former political prisoner who has vowed to improve South Korea's much-criticised human rights record.

Justice Minister Park Sang-Cheon conceded Seoul had bowed to international pressure by agreeing to free the 17 as part of the anniversary amnesty which will benefit a total of 8,812 people.

"We decided to release Woo Yong-Gak and 16 other long-term prisoners on humanitarian grounds to meet calls from Amnesty International and other groups for their release," he said.

The move is aimed at creating "greater national harmony" and helping economic recovery in South Korea which plunged into a major financial crisis in December 1997, the minister added.

Woo, 71, will walk free from a prison south of Seoul Thursday after serving 41 years of a life sentence for espionage, making him the world's longest-serving prisoner of conscience, according to Amnesty International.

Rights groups had demanded the release of the 17 — who have served between 30 and 41 years of their life sentences — by waiving a condition that they sign a disputed oath of obedience to South Korea's laws.

Park said 1,508 prisoners would be paroled on the anniversary of Kim's inauguration.

A further 7,292 people, including those convicted of petty offences such as traffic violations and economic infractions, will have their rights restored.

The 17, convicted under earlier regimes of spying for North Korea or of having Communist sympathies, are the highlight of the par-

don, which also benefits some trade unionists jailed for inciting illegal strikes and protests.

Crucially, the president waived the requirement for political prisoners to sign an oath of obedience to laws, including the draconian National Security Law (NSL) which bans the display of any pro-North Korean sentiment.

The justice minister also indicated the 17 elderly and mostly sickly convicts may be allowed the rare opportunity to cross over to the Communist North after their release.

The two Koreas, which share the world's last cold war frontier, have remained technically at war since their 1950-53 conflict.

The 17 men — aged between 54 and 71 — missed out on two amnesties last year when they refused to sign the oath, which they see as an infringement of their freedom of speech.

Amnesty International has demanded their release, the abolition of the oath and the repeal of the NSL, saying more than 250 people had been arrested under it since Kim came to power.

Kim spent around eight years in jail in the 1970s and 1980s as an outspoken critic of the military dictatorships of the time. He was sentenced to death in 1980 on charges of sedition.

But while the long-awaited release of the last long-term prisoners of conscience was welcomed by their families and foreign analysts, there was anger that more than 300 other political prisoners remain behind bars.

"This is insufficient," said Nam Kyu-Sun, of prisoners' family group Minkahyup, as the group staged a noisy protest in Seoul.

"We are disappointed because only 41 political prisoners of a total of 302 will be released. We demand that the government release all other political prisoners without any conditions."

Diplomats said the move was "praiseworthy and overdue," but warned further arrests under the NSL could set back the progress.



Indian President K.R. Narayanan (right) walks with a ceremonial escort into parliament for his address to both houses of parliament in New Delhi. The crucial budget session of parliament opened today with Narayanan's address to lawmakers. Also seen are speaker of the lower house G.M.C. Balayogi (second left), Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee (left) and, (centre), Parliament Affairs Minister R. Kumaramangalam (Reuters photo)

Indian government faces turbulent parliament session

NEW DELHI: India (AP) — India's parliament opened Monday amid cacophony and slogan shouting, offering a glimpse of what the session has in store for the shaky coalition government whose wafer-thin majority will be challenged by a series of controversial issues.

Principal among them is the imposition of federal rule in Bihar, an eastern state where a series of massacres of lower caste Hindus forced Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee to dismiss the state government.

The decision will have to be ratified by a simple majority vote in parliament in the face of stiff opposition by several parties. Former chief minister

Laloo Prasad Yadav, whose ruling Rashtriya Janata Dal government was dismissed in Bihar, set the tone when several of his supporters rushed into the well of the house shouting, "down with this autocratic government" moments after the session opened. The house was adjourned hastily, but as scheduled.

The main opposition Congress party has not made it clear if it will support imposition in Bihar of president's rule — federal rule is commonly called president's rule because the cabinet governs in the name of the president. Its support is crucial because smaller left-wing parties have said they support Yadav.

Last week, the Indian national Lok Dal, which has four lawmakers,

announced it would withdraw from the government because of its refusal to roll back prices of subsidised essential goods. But the party said it would continue to vote with Vajpayee, meaning he can count on 276 votes. A simple majority is 272.

The 11-month-old Bharatiya Janata Party government Saturday presents its budget for the year 1999-2000. Several contentious economic issues including the proposed disinvestment of public sector companies and opening of the insurance sector will be hotly debated.

Opposition parties are also likely to criticise the government over the recent attacks on Christians and their property in several parts of India.

India raves, Pakistan lukewarm on detente

NEW DELHI (R) — India raved Monday over its prime minister's goodwill visit to Pakistan, where the leaders of the nuclear-capable rivals agreed on steps to put relations on a safer footing.

But reactions were muted in Pakistan, which maintains that the bitter, decades-old dispute over the Himalayan region of Kashmir remains the core irritant in relations.

Indian newspapers said Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's weekend visit to Lahore on the maiden trip of a cross-border bus service marked a quantum leap towards easing mutual hostility.

"Ice is finally broken," the Times of India proclaimed in a banner headline that was echoed by several dailies.

Parliamentarians cheered as President K.R. Narayanan, in a state-of-the-nation address, said the two sides would work for pacts on far-reaching confidence-building measures.

Venkaiah Naidu, spokesman for Vajpayee's Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (bjp), said the "entire country" was happy with the prime minister's visit to Pakistan.

"The Lahore declaration

is a major breakthrough," he said.

"This trip has brought a sentimental change in the entire subcontinent."

Pakistan's media was more restrained. The Nation — which said India had typically focused on symptoms at the summit while Pakistan focused on the malaise — was the only one of the major English-language newspapers to run an editorial on the subject.

Vajpayee and Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif agreed in Lahore on steps to reduce the risk of an accidental escalation of hostilities and to wind down regional tension which mounted after they ordered rival nuclear tests last May.

The two sides agreed to notify each other about ballistic missile tests, extend their moratoria on further test explosions and notify each other immediately of accidental or unauthorised incidents that could create the risk of escalating tension.

They also pledged to establish means of communication to cut the risk of accidental war and to review existing communications and confidence-building measures before the middle of this year.

While both sides committed themselves to resolving "all issues, including the issue of Jammu and Kashmir", there were no concrete proposals on the dispute which was the cause of two of their three wars since 1947.

"It must be realised that if the fundamental issue of Kashmir is not resolved, the smaller issues cannot be resolved," said one Pakistani official just minutes before a joint news conference by the two prime ministers to unveil their agreements.

Vajpayee, keeping his comments brief, told the news conference that it was "much too early" to say what solution would emerge.

However, on his return to new Delhi, he said he had told Sharif that continued violence in Kashmir would make normalisation of relations difficult.

"I told him this kind of killing must stop," he told reporters, referring to the murder of nine Hindu villagers last week in the two-thirds of Kashmir ruled by India.

Pakistan, which rules the rest of Kashmir, denies India's charges that it arms and trains Kashmiri separatist militants.

China signals stronger campaign against dissent

BEIJING (AFP) — China Monday signalled an intensified campaign against dissent just 11 days before its parliament meets to debate the inclusion of "acts against state security" as a new crime under the constitution.

In an apparent attack on dissidents, the official legal daily said in its editorial that there were "people who have weak awareness and low consciousness of state security."

"Some people block the state security organs tasked with implementing public affairs according to the law. Some people leak state security secrets and cause severe damage to the government's work," said the paper, the official voice of China's judiciary.

"These hostile elements always hide under a legal and open cover to carry out their secret and illegal activity. The special organs of the government should depend on the people to get their support and assistance to expose our enemies and give them no place to hide," the paper said.

"We should be aware that the situation is not safe and that hostile foreign forces never stop their activities of endangering state security," it added.

The editorial also urged China's leaders to pay closer attention to the country's security.

"At a time when we are focused on economic construction and reform, the leaders at various levels within the party especially the high-level leaders should consistently

keep high vigilance and put the state sovereignty and security on top priority," it said.

A Western diplomat told AFP the ongoing crackdown was "not unusual" as the government normally likes to "tidy things up before the National Peoples Congress (NPC)."

One of the issues to be debated is the move to drop the term "counter-revolutionary" crime from its constitution and replace it with acts against state security.

The term will simply replace the wording in article 28 of the constitution.

The new crime of "acts against state security" was already applied in December against several prominent dissidents including leaders of the banned China Democracy Party (cdp).

Authorities have cracked down on the outlawed democracy party whose members have defiantly called for a congress next week — just days before the annual full session of parliament, the npc, starts on March 5.

The cdp, the first group to actively seek to challenge the Communist Party's 50-year monopoly on power, plans to hold its congress in the central city of Wuhan on March 1 to 3.

Authorities last December jailed the cdp leaders Beijing-based Xu Wenli, together with Wuhan activist Qin Yongmin and party founder Wang Youcai, for 13, 12 and 11 years respectively on charges of subversion.

Police Saturday broke up a lunar new year party by some 50 cdp activists in the eastern city of Hangzhou in Zhejiang province and detained Wang Jinbo from neighbouring Shandong province who had attended the gathering. Wang is still being detained, his family said Monday.

On Feb. 12 authorities detained Wuhan-based cdp activities Xiao Shicheng and his colleague Chen Zhonghe for several hours and warned them against holding the congress.

Police in Beijing, in the northern city of Xian and in Wuhan also detained three other party members, warning them to stop activities related to the fledgling democracy party.

Another outspoken activist Peng Ming, remains in custody despite the lapse of a 15-day detention imposed on him since January 25 when he was held on charges of soliciting prostitutes.

Two Shanghai activists, Han Lifa and Cai Guihua, who were involved with the banned democracy party were also detained late October and given nine-month "reeducation through labour" terms for suspected involvement with prostitutes.

The old crime of counter-revolutionary actions actually disappeared from the legal lexicon in 1997 but several dissidents sentenced under it are still being detained, human rights groups said.

Gusmao to ask Australia to support peacekeeping force in East Timor

SYDNEY (AFP) — East Timorese rebel Leader Xanana Gusmao said Monday he would ask Australian foreign Affairs Minister Alexander Downer to support a peacekeeping force in the troubled territory.

Gusmao, under house detention after being moved from jail this month, is to meet Downer Thursday.

"We'll ask for the foreign minister and the Australian government to help us set

up a peacekeeping force in East Timor," he told ABC TV.

"We know that maintaining peace in East Timor is our responsibility and as we want a peaceful solution, we need peacekeeping troops as a symbol," he said.

"We'll ask for the understanding of the Australian government to push Indonesia to disperse the militias in East Timor, civilians who have been given

the authority to enforce the law, but who are only provoking or intimidating people."

Prime Minister John Howard said Monday it was too early to say what contribution might be needed from Australia and urged caution to all those involved in Timor's future.

Howard favours a phased progression towards independence, including a period of autonomy under Indonesian rule, rather than

immediate independence. Gusmao said he would also like an Australian consul in East Timor.

"If I can ask for the existence of a new consul in East Timor it may help us, especially as the relationship between Darwin people and the Timorese has been set up a long time ago," he said.

"Darwin was the only way in and out of Portuguese Timor and I hope the relationship between Australian

and Timorese will be improved.

"Darwin is a place where we can hope for food or medical supplies when it is necessary."

He said his move to house arrest had been viewed by Indonesia as solving some problems in relation to East Timor.

"I am quite happy knowing this development has made many people in and out of the country give it their attention."

Pardon for jailed Philippine rebels put on hold

MANILA (AFP) — Philippine President Joseph Estrada suspended the release of 50 jailed Communist guerrillas Monday and deployed more than 3,000 soldiers to track down rebel units which abducted an army general and two other security officials.

The new people's army (npa) had snatched army Brigadier General Victor Obillo, Captain Eduardo Montealto and police chief inspector Roberto Bernal to turn up the pressure on the government to restart stalled peace talks.

"I was about to give amnesty to about 50 political detainees but we held it because of this incidence of kidnapping," Estrada told reporters after the police officer was abducted Sunday.

"After this incident that happened, we have to rethink," added Estrada, referring to the government's stated aim to seek a politi-

cal settlement to the 30-year Maoist insurgency.

Bernal was kidnapped by the npa near the town of Bacon in the eastern Philippines Sunday in an operation which left a police informant dead.

The two army officers were captured near the southern city of davao last week. Obillo heads an engineering brigade in the southern island of Mindanao while the captain is the unit's logistics officer.

The government's chief peace negotiator, Howard Dee, warned Monday that the general's capture "undermines the prospects for progress in the peace talks."

He said he had written to his rebel counterpart "to propose the early and unconditional release" of the captives "as a goodwill and confidence-building measure."

The peace talks with the Communists were suspended last

year amid disagreement on how to implement a preliminary accord signed by the previous government of Fidel Ramos.

The agreement called for the release of imprisoned guerrillas and compensation for victims of human rights abuses during the counter-insurgency campaign of the late dictator Ferdinand Marcos.

Estrada did not identify the 50 prisoners set to be pardoned and did not say if this was in line with the preliminary accord signed in The Hague in March last year.

Last week his government had threatened to cancel the entire agreement due to the kidnapping of Obillo.

Military officials say the npa is demanding the military suspend operations against the rebels, and that senior rebel leader Amado Payot be included in the list of jailed guerrillas to be given

amnesty.

More than 80 npa rebels are serving prison terms for murder or weapons charges. Two of the detainees are serving life terms after being convicted of the 1989 murder of u.s. military adviser colonel James Rowe.

Army chief Lieutenant General Raul Urgello told reporters 3,000 soldiers were conducting a search and rescue operation in the Apo mountain region of Mindanao for two npa units which are holding one hostage each.

A small infantry unit was separately tracking down the police officer's abductors.

Estrada Monday described the abductions as "pure and simple treachery" and warned that "if something happens to General Obillo, then I think something serious will happen." He did not elaborate.

The npa is the armed wing of

the Maoist Communist Party of the Philippines (pp).

pp founder Jose Maria Sison told dzb radio by telephone from his base in the Netherlands that Bernal and the two other captives were "targets of opportunity."

"The arrests of military and police officers is in line with the policy of the revolutionary movement to launch offensives, raids and ambushes," Sison said.

"We were not able to undertake these in the past years" because the movement was "devoted to mass work and rectification" of previous strategic mistakes, he added.

Sison said the rebels' National Democratic Front Organisation was undertaking an "act of generosity by offering negotiations to release the prisoners of war," and warned government intransigence could cause the captives "harm."

Russia's foreign minister says talks on Kurils should continue

TOKYO (AP) — Russia's foreign minister denied reports that his country has given up on settling a territorial dispute with Japan by 2000, saying Monday that the two sides should continue to pursue a solution.

Japanese news reports quoted Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov as telling Japanese Foreign Minister Masahiko Komura Sunday that a deal on the Kuril Islands by 2000 was not possible.

But Ivanov told reporters Monday that the two countries would keep trying.

"We intend to actively pursue an accord on the peace treaty," Ivanov said. He said Russia was awaiting Japan's response to a

proposed compromise. Details of Russia's plan have not been released.

Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary Hiromu Nonaka said that Tokyo too would keep trying.

"We will continue to make our best efforts to conclude the treaty by resolving" the dispute by 2000, Kyodo news agency quoted Nonaka as saying.

Disagreement over the Kuril Islands, controlled by Russia but claimed by Japan, has kept Tokyo and Moscow from signing a treaty officially ending World War II.

Ivanov was in Japan for talks with government officials. He and Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi met

Monday.

Tokyo claimed title to the disputed islands — Etorofu, Kunashiri, Shikotan and the Habomai islets — in a treaty with Russia in 1875. The Soviet Union took the islands in the closing days of World War II, a move Japan has protested ever since as illegal.

In November, President Boris Yeltsin and Obuchi signed a declaration pledging to seek an end to the dispute over the kurils before 2000. It gave no indication of how that might be resolved.

Japanese government officials have reportedly said a breakthrough is unlikely any time soon.

Jordan Times

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Legitimate concern

ARAB-ISRAELI Knesset member Azmi Bishara, the leader of the National Democratic Alliance Party better known as Balad has stirred a hornet's nest in Israel recently when he questioned the Zionist nature of the state and its "racist" laws. "It's time for Israel to become a normal country for all its citizens and not be defined as a homeland for the world's Jews," Bishara said Saturday in a radio interview. "We must change the image and Zionist character of Israel and take into account that more than one million Arabs live in this country," added Bishara. It was Israeli Minister Michael Eitan who sounded the alarm first about Balad's platform and said that "a party which rejects the existence of the state of Israel is breaking the law and cannot put forward candidates for election."

In actual terms, what Balad's leader has said is exactly what several U.N. human rights bodies have been saying all along. Every time Israel submits a report to a U.N. human rights committee monitoring member states' adherence to principal human rights conventions, it is put to task on this very subject and repeatedly questioned about the legitimacy of calling itself a Jewish state with special and privileged treatment for Jewish people within Israel and in the diaspora.

Accordingly, what the National Democratic Alliance has voiced concern about is a legitimate international issue. Bishara cannot therefore be accused of breaking Israeli law when a similar concern is expressed internationally and by the very same global organisations which are mandated to monitor Israel's compliance with its treaty bodies.

The rule of thumb under binding international human rights law, is that states cannot be established on religious, ethnic or racial grounds. This is admittedly a vexing issue on which countries could be divided with reason. But no matter how the international community ultimately views this subject, it remains a legitimate issue for exploration and perusal. Bishara did the right thing by raising the issue. Moreover, Israel is de facto a bi-national state anyway since about a quarter of its population is non-Jewish. There will come a point in time when Israel will have to reckon juridically with this fact and amend its laws accordingly. Instead of condemning Balad's leader, the Israeli establishment should be gratified for the opportunity to air his views no matter how controversial they may appear to be and allow a full and thorough national debate over it, the sooner the better.

ARABIC PRESS COMMENTARIES

Al Ra'i's Taher Adwan said many people in the public and private sectors are enthusiastic about a two-day holiday, introduced by Prime Minister Fayez Tarawneh. Universities and schools adopted this holiday years ago, and its implementation proved without negative side effects, Adwan noted, asking what is preventing governmental and non-governmental organisations from changing? Jordan is a small country, where the productivity is limited and employment is not as in the developing countries, which have already adopted a two-day holiday, said the writer. Exceptional solutions could be set up for businesspersons and industrialists, who might have some fears about the issue, he added, suggesting that effectively facilitating financial, custom, investment and export regulation on Thursdays could help get rid of these fears. In fact, Adwan said, instead of reading, for example, most Jordanians use Fridays to sleep, pray and to eat "mansaf and have a barbecue," and thus, there is no real meaning in holidays. The writer said he is enthusiastic for the idea as it might shift society's idea about the weekend.

Al Dastour's Mazen Saket said the government's efforts to encourage investment, especially with recent Arab and international pledges to provide support, coincide with the country's general objectives to meet the current economic crisis. However, Saket added, these efforts has not considered priorities and the need to comprehensively solve the extensive economic crisis. Talk about encouraging investment, developing management, facilitating regulations and activating the role of some institutions in fact ignores the essence of the problem, the writer said. No doubt the government is aware that most of the industrial, agricultural, production and even tourist projects are facing real problems for many reasons. Saket noted. The private sector, its investment and projects are suffering from similar obstacles, which means, according to the writer, that the crisis is not related to privatisation. These facts require decision-makers to pay attention to the priorities and challenges in order to meet the problem, Saket said.

Wisdom or insolvency of the Arab state

THE PUBLICATION of the latest (1998) edition of the Unified Arab Economic Report (UAER) is the occasion for my annual bird's eye view of the economic condition of the Arab World, defined as all the member countries of the Arab League. As was the situation last year, the pan-Arab economic condition remains very mixed, rather erratic, and still very vulnerable, but with the continuing good news of some positive trends. This report is published annually by four Arab institutions — the Arab Monetary Fund, the Organisation of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries, the League of Arab States, and the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development — who should be commended for their good work.

The data in the 1998 UAER indicate two noteworthy trends: during the nearly two decades since the early 1980s, most macro-economic indicators in the Arab World have been troubling, but a select few indicators have improved. Nevertheless, the Arab world remains defined by a wider context of a general stress on the living conditions of most Arab families, and b) the fragmentation of the Arab population into a small group of relatively wealthy, educated Arabs who can take care of their families, and a large group of relatively poor, professionally under-achieving Arabs whose fundamental family needs and future remain vulnerable. The data reveals the following trends for the entire Arab World in the period 1980-1997:

- The Arab population increased by 60 per cent, from 165 million to 264 million, but the annual population growth rate has declined in the same period from 4 to 2.5 per cent.
 - Total Arab gross domestic product (GDP) at current prices has increased by an annual average of over six per cent in the last three years, reaching \$599 billion in 1997. This is an increase of 37 per cent since 1980 — compared to 60 per cent population increase over the same period.
 - Thus, the economic measure or wealth of the average Arab person (per capita Arab gross domestic product) increased to \$2268 in 1997, the third consecutive year of increase. But because the Arab population over the medium term has been growing faster than the Arab economy, individual wealth (per capita Arab gross domestic product) still shows a net decline of 13% from the high of \$2612 registered in 1980. (In real terms, accounting for inflation, the retreat was much worse).

(We should be cautious about the short-term increase of 1996-97, though, because it was largely due to rising oil prices; those prices have now plunged. The average oil price of \$16 per barrel in 1994 increased to \$20 per barrel in 1996 and 1997, but this winter it has been under \$10 per barrel — so the total income figures for the Arab world should plummet in 1998 and 1999, given that oil income still represents over 55 per cent of total government income in the entire Arab world).

- Arab oil income continues to fluctuate, registering \$118 b. in 1997, compared to \$99 b. in 1995, \$87 b. in 1994, and \$58 b. in 1987. Arab oil production continues to increase, reaching 19.5 million barrels per day in 1997, compared to an average of under 15 million bpd a decade earlier.

- Total Arab exports of \$177 b. in 1997 and imports of \$147 b. both represent modest annual increases; the trade surplus rose from \$12 b. in 1994 to \$30 b. in 1997. Total Arab reliance on imported food remains high and largely unchanged, at over \$22 billion annually in recent years.
 - Fiscal trends are one of the brighter areas of the Arab economic condition. Total government expenditures as a percentage of Arab GDP are steady at 36 per cent, significantly below the average of 44 per cent a decade earlier. Arab spending on defence and security remains relatively high and unchanged, averaging 27 per cent of total current expenditures during the past decade; but spending on social services also remains substantial, averaging 25 per cent over the past decade.

- Official Arab financial reserves continue to rise, reaching \$74 b. in 1997 — a 55 per cent increase over the average level of a decade ago. Arab government budget deficits also continue to drop sharply, from \$69 b. in 1991 to \$16 b. in 1996 and \$11 b. in 1997; correspondingly, government budget deficits as a percentage of GDP have declined from 18% in 1991 to 2.2% in 1997 — a cumulative and impressive 80 per cent decline in the past decade.
 - Arab published foreign debt remains stubbornly high — and is also probably deceptively under-reported in most Arab countries. It was \$157 b. in 1996, representing a 36 per cent increase over the previous decade. Annual debt service was steady at around \$12.5 b. in 1996, and debt interest payments alone were also steady at some \$5.6 b. Foreign debt remains at around 110 per cent of total exports, not significantly changed in the past decade. Debt service as

View from the Fourth Circle



Rami G. Khouri

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a percentage of exports has declined slightly in the past decade, from 11 to 8 per cent of exports.

- Arab governments still seem to have trouble taxing their own people: tax revenues account for just 29 per cent of Arab government revenues (even more problematic is that government revenues from direct taxation of income and profits remain stagnant at around just eight per cent of total government revenues). Research is sorely needed here to determine if the Arab state's weak capacity to tax its own people reflects a problem of logistics or political legitimacy.

These aggregate figures continue to reveal wide and erratic swings in many indicators, pointing out chronic Arab economic vulnerabilities in fields such as foreign trade, government income, foreign debt, taxation, food security, and other sectors that are crucial to the well-being of families and countries. But there is also some good news for the Arab people to celebrate, especially in terms of increasingly responsible fiscal behaviour by governments. We do not know, however, if some of the positive trends are a function of wisdom or insolvency on the part of our public authorities. Both of these attributes are common in the Arab World. It would be useful for Arab research institutions to take these figures and mine them further for their full political, economic and strategic meaning.

The strength of the euro and global challenges

By Jacques Chirac

THE ECONOMIC powerhouses of the United States and the European Union (EU) exert a decisive influence on world growth. Our two entities account for 57 per cent of the wealth produced in the world. This places a special responsibility upon us, and we need an intensive but trustful transatlantic dialogue if we are to gain balanced world growth. Let me be clear, we need to discuss a new global financial architecture, and I am happy to be going to Washington to talk about this with America's highest officials and the leaders of international financial institutions.

The start of 1999 witnessed an outstanding event with the birth of the euro. For the first time in history, countries have instituted a single currency by an act of peaceful and democratic political will. The nations of Europe wanted the euro in order to ensure economic growth and jobs creation, and to work toward a common future, not to compete with the dollar, as some have claimed. America has everything to gain from the strong, stable and open Europe that we are trying to achieve with the euro. It is an instrument of stability as it does away with currency volatility within the euro zone. This stability promotes trade within the EU as well as between Europe and its major partners, the United States foremost among them.

The euro will also naturally stimulate competition, since it will spur greater efficiency. That will benefit American companies wanting to expand their presence in Europe. For the world at large, the euro will boost trade and economic growth.

This is why France has adopted the euro with confidence: we're well aware that we will need to become more competitive in order to be an ever more attractive, investor-friendly place. It will take several years for the euro to become a reserve currency. But its birth has already changed the international monetary situation. Henceforward, the dollar

and the euro, alongside the yen, will be the benchmark currencies for the great majority of financial transactions, and their exchange rates with one another will dominate the world economic scene.

The United States and the EU form the most stable area in the world, thanks to their implementation of sound economic policies. But this stability on both sides of the Atlantic stands in stark contrast to the instability prevailing elsewhere. This disparity ought to put us on our guard: It would be a mistake to think that our growth can be sustained independently of growth in other parts of the world.

Consequently, it is up to the United States, Europe and Japan to preserve a world environment conducive to growth, at a time when many emerging countries are making considerable efforts to overcome their difficulties. Growth depends on stability between our currencies. This stability should not be achieved by artificial means that prevent the necessary adjustments from taking place or imperil another crucial factor, price stability. Nor can it be achieved without a substantial strengthening of cooperation between us. We, therefore, need to look for the means and procedures to achieve currency stability, continuously and on a commonly accepted basis.

France and Germany share identical views on this subject. And during the Japanese prime minister's recent visit to Paris, a community of thinking with our Japanese partners emerged. I hope to find the same convergence of views in the United States during my visit.

We live in a fragile world, as repeated crises in Mexico, Asia, Russia and now Brazil have demonstrated.

To be sure, the financial community has acted swiftly to deal with the immediate consequences of these crises, thanks in particular to the strong intervention of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the financial support of the Group of Seven (G7) leading industrialised nations. Europe fully contributed to this, alongside the United States,

making available its full share of the funding needed to tackle the crises. Europe has not remained complacent nor inactive.

But, beyond these short-term responses, we need more ambitious ones.

Any such undertaking will take time. This is yet another reason to make haste, for the human, social and political consequences of notably these financial disorders are taking a heavy toll in many countries. We must not forget that democracy takes root in economic development, and that loss of confidence in the future creates fertile soil for demagogues.

I am convinced that the foundations laid at Bretton Woods 50 years ago, which long underpinned the economic prosperity of the world, must now be adapted to today's fast-changing global economy. We know what risks we must avoid. We must resist the temptation to withdraw behind national barriers, the siren song of trade and financial protectionism and the appeal of unilateral action. We must eschew ideological responses and focus on concrete solutions, to be arrived at through concerted action embracing all concerned. Our purpose should be to provide a global response to the financial crises sweeping the world — a response that encompasses political and social aspects, as well as economic ones.

The heads of state and government of G-7 have gotten the ball rolling politically by recognising the need to rebuild the international financial architecture. Now, we must define with precision what is needed and implement the key reforms that would strengthen international monetary and financial relations and make them more conducive to world growth and development.

We already know the direction we should be working in: We must ensure that states and international financial institutions become as transparent as is necessary, disseminating the required information. We must also encourage an orderly liberalisation of the flow of capital, and improve market regulation by adopting a

genuine "highway code" for capital flows, whether they emanate from hedge funds or offshore centres. We must also increase the political accountability of the IMF by turning its Interim Committee into an accountable body. We must, furthermore, involve the private sector more effectively in the solution of crises. Lastly, and above all, we must make sure that we take the social dimensions of the crises more fully into account. For example, at the G-7 summit in Cologne in June, we should come up with a definitive solution to the debt problem of the poorest countries. We also need to boost our official development aid.

We have made a start on all of this: solutions are beginning to emerge. But much still remains to be done, and swiftly.

The G-7 heads of state are well aware of their responsibilities in these areas. I have discussed these issues with U.S. President Bill Clinton on several occasions. I know he too shares this sense of urgency. This should be the year in which the necessary reforms are implemented.

Building on the decisions to be made at the forthcoming G7 summit, France has proposed convening a summit of the member countries of the IMF Interim Committee, if possible in the fall. And why not in Paris? This summit would solemnly approve these reforms and chart, with the assent of all, a new course toward a better-managed globalisation "with a human face."

The writer is president of France. This article first appeared in the Wall Street Journal.

Letters to the editor

A cleaner Amman

A CAUSE worthy of mention and acknowledgement.

Thank you for a good article about those who deserve most credit for our clean city (The men in orange; overlooked, forgotten and abused, yet vital to Amman. JT, Feb. 22nd, page 3). It is high time that laws about littering be implemented.

Reem Habayeb
 Amman

Beware BCM's

IT IS a source of comfort to know that there are other people who think like me Out of Order ("The bigger they come, the harder they fall", Feb. 13) was just brilliant. However, there was just one thing which puzzled me. In the list of potential candidates for the Unnamed State, he mentioned the U.K. as being non-European. Well, I happened to be born in England and during my school days I was under the illusion that the U.K. was part of Europe. Then I thought again: Nowadays British prime ministers seem more anxious to appease the U.S. government than their fellow Europeans: united they stand against any thought of revoking the embargo against Iraq and all together into such ventures as "Desert Fox" as though the desert abounded with foxes! (how distasteful to give such names to bombing campaigns which kill people). The euro and monetary union? Just forget it! (for the moment).

However, I plead with Jordan to proceed with caution on privatisation, especially television. As far as I can see, the only thing commercial television succeeds in increasing is the level of trash! I remember once an Italian acquaintance asked me (I think he was only half joking) "What is the difference between a washing machine and a television?" I promptly replied "One washes clothes and the other washes brains" (correct answer!) Also I beg my Jordanian friends to be careful of the 'Big Corporate

Monster's' (BCM's) prowling around ready to engulf you with messages of (their) salvation.

Janet Anderson
 Milan
 Italy

A happy customer

I AM AN English lady staying in Aqaba.

Before I left England I was besieged by friends who tried (without success) to prevent me travelling to the Middle East.

"You are not seriously thinking of going," they exclaimed, followed by a series of do's and don'ts: "You won't be able to eat anything, was followed by don't drink the water, wash all fruit and if you must eat salad wash it yourself in boiled water etc. etc."

I have totally ignored all these dire warnings and have thoroughly enjoyed everything. In fact not in years I felt so fit.

The sweetness and simplicity of your unspoiled country and its people have filled me with a peace and happiness that I have not felt for many years.

I have been invited to spice shops to drink mint tea and into others for coffee. Even the veiled ladies have smiled at me and encouraged their children to return my wave.

How lovely! I have travelled the world and seldom felt so safe. I am a poet, and I am here for four weeks to complete a poetry book to be published in America.

I intend to come back again and again to lovely Jordan. I have been to Wadi Rum and still have Petra to see. Lucky me!

Dulcie Levene
 (Dorset poet)
 International Society of Poets
 'Poet of the Year'
 Washington

Customs and industry

A FEW months ago when the new government arrived we heard more promises that the customs duties levied on raw materials that goes into manufacturing will gradually be lowered and some will even be abolished. And now we hear rumours that the Ministry of Finance is against it because of the loss of around JD80 million in income for the government.

To us industrialists the problem is simpler: if the issue of customs duty is not solved soon, more and more industries will suffer and some will even go bankrupt.

The government should not forget that the industrial sector employs around 120,000 people which constitutes a fairly large section of our economy.

How can the government ask us to reinvest, plan further ahead and not expect quick profits, yet does not apply this strategy to its own policies? Why can the government invest millions in infrastructure, as for example in the tourist sector in areas like Petra and the Dead Sea, yet refuses to act to save the industrial sector. By this I mean that the benefit to any loss of revenue will be more than recovered with time, through taxes levied on successful industries, so why does the government refuse to invest in our future?

There are possibly two reasons. The first is short-sightedness on the part of the government, and the second is the lack of influence we as industrialists have on the policies of our government. The fact of the matter is that we do not as industrialists have any influence in Parliament, and the industrial sector is fragmented, because the people that represent us in the several chambers of industries that have sprung up recently, either don't care or are unable to unite to present one forceful lobby in order to influence policies.

Marwan Nassar
 Jordan Rubber Industries Co.
 Amman

Genetically modified food has become a multi-billion transnational industry. However, recent findings suggest that such food can seriously undermine the environment and the human immune system

'Trust me, I'm a genetic engineer'

By Gwynne Dyer

"We simply do not know the long-term consequences for human health and the wider environment (of genetically modified crops)... If something does go badly wrong, we will be faced with the problem of clearing up a kind of pollution which is self-perpetuating. I am not convinced that anyone has the first idea of how this could be done."

— Charles, Prince of Wales, June 1998

LESS THAN a year ago, that was about as tough as the opposition to genetically modified (GM) foods got, in Britain or anywhere else: genteel expressions of concern by people essentially without power, many of whom were seen as cranks. ("If 'Big Ears' is against it, it can't be all bad.") Meanwhile the GM juggernaut rolled on unimpeded, bearing Monsanto, Zeneca, Novartis and the other major bio-technology companies towards a very lucrative Promised Land.

How distant that all seems now. Ten days ago (12 February), the first evidence of health problems connected with GM foods that was even remotely plausible surfaced in Britain. It is fairly flimsy evidence, one must say, but it has unleashed a frenzy of media criticism that has been just waiting to happen, and it's now virtually certain that no commercial GM crops will be grown in Britain for years. It is quite likely that this will trigger similar revolts in the rest of Europe, and reinforce the growing Third World resistance to the spread of GM technologies there. It is even possible that the protests, boycotts, and demands for segregation and clear labelling of GM products will spread back to North America, where criticism hitherto has been extremely muted.

To Bob Shapiro, CEO of Monsanto and erstwhile Master of the Universe, it must all feel very unfair. After all, nothing specific has been proved about the dangers of GM foods either to consumers or to the environment. He even claims to be an environmentally sensitive 'green' himself, and looks hurt when anybody else questions his motives. But there is certainly a strong whiff of Nemesis about the proceedings.

When Shapiro took over as CEO of Monsanto four years ago, it was a middling-to-large agrochemical combine with a huge problem: the patent for the highly successful weed-killer that provided the bulk of its income, Round-up, was due to expire soon. He came up with a brilliant solution.

It's already out there in the marketplace. Monsanto now sells seeds that are genetically engineered to be resistant to Round-up — which makes them very attractive to farmers, who can get a better yield for the same dose of herbicide. And just to make sure that they don't buy some cheap knock-off version of Round-up from a competitor, the seeds come with a contract obliging the farmer to buy Round-up from Monsanto. That's TWO profit centres where there used to be one, so now everybody loved him.

True, it meant that American consumers now had to eat these genetically modified (GM) foods, like it or not — and since the U.S. exports huge amounts of food, all sorts of foreigners had to eat them too. Moreover, Monsanto needed a lot of farmers to commit to Round-up Ready seeds before its patent on Round-up herbicide expired, so there wasn't too much time for lengthy trials to see whether its GM products were safe for the consumer and the environment. So Shapiro became one of the biggest contributors of 'soft money' to Bill Clinton's 1996 election campaign. Next thing you know, he's special trade adviser to the president. Getting GM products onto the shelves of American supermarkets was a no-brainer — the U.S. media are half-asleep, and the public doesn't seem to care what it eats so long as the portions are giant-size — and Canadian consumers didn't pose much of a problem either.

Europeans, on the other hand, were deeply suspicious of these 'Frankenstein foods', mainly because they had just been through a major health scare over Bovine Spongiform Encephalitis ('mad cow disease'), which is transmitted from cattle to humans through the consumption of infected beef. Ten years ago all the experts, apart from a few maverick scientists, were sure that BSE could not cross the species barrier and infect people — but the alarmist mavericks were right. Which explains, according to John Durant, professor of public understanding at Imperial College, London, why 'people in Europe (are now) very sensitive to new technologies in the food supply industry, and very wary of scientists and government attempts to reassure them.'

Monsanto dealt with European fears (or rather, tried to override them) by the strategy of systematically mixing GM and non-GM products together before exporting them. When the Europeans objected to this, demanding clear segregation and labelling of GM foods, Shapiro got his good buddy Clinton to threaten a trade war, and they quickly caved in. (Leaked New Zealand government documents from early 1998 show a similar pattern, with Washington threatening to pull out of a potential free trade agreement if New Zealand went ahead with its plans for labelling and testing genetically modified foods.)

Late 1998, in retrospect, was probably the high noon of Monsanto's incipient world empire. Thirty per cent of the U.S. soya bean crop and 15 per cent of its corn was grown

from Round-up Ready seed last year, with both figures set to double in the next two years. An orgy of acquisitions, including corn-seed producer Dekalb Genetics Corp., grain-trading and processed foods giant Cargill, and Unilever's crop-breeding unit, which specialises in hybrid wheats, turned Monsanto into the world's dominant biotech company, with an estimated worth of \$35 billion (up sixfold in five years).

'In [India] the farmers' association launched 'Operation Cremate Monsanto' and burned out two experimental fields of GM [genetically modified] cotton'

Monsanto also bought up Delta Pine and Land last year for \$4 billion, thus acquiring its 'terminator seed technology': a genetic modification that prevents seeds harvested from GM plants from germinating if replanted. This is a technology without much relevance in North America, where most farmers buy all their seed anyway, but it was vital to Monsanto's plans in the Third World. It also turned out to be a flashpoint for resistance.

"By peddling suicide seeds, the biotechnology multi-nationals will lock the world's poorest farmers into a new form of genetic serfdom," explains Emma Must, campaigns officer of the World Development Movement. "Currently 80 per cent of crops in developing countries are grown using farm-saved seed. Being unable to save seeds from sterile crops could mean the difference between surviving and going under. 'More precisely, it would speed the consolidation of small firms into the hands of those with the money to engage in industrialised agrobusiness' — which generally means higher profits, but less employment and lower yields per acre."

"The terminator gene will pose a serious threat to Indian agriculture," warned Babagouda Patil, Indian minister of rural

development — and in Karnataka state the farmers' association launched 'Operation Cremate Monsanto' and burned out two experimental fields of GM cotton. Meanwhile in Britain, Arpad Pusztai, a professor at the Rowett Research Institute in Aberdeen, reported in April that an experiment in which laboratory rats were fed genetically modified potatoes had caused weakened immune systems and damage to vital organs.

The protests from the Third World, however, were drowned out by a major advertising campaign claiming that GM crops were the answer to the threat of global famine. This is tripe, as the world currently has plenty of food — the problem is getting it into the hands of the poor — but it sounded much better than saying that GM foods would raise the profits of biotech firms and farmers in the rich countries.

As for the inconvenient British researcher, he was forced into retirement after only three days, while various experts came forward to say that his research was 'muddled.' On the surface, the plan for global domination still seemed to be unfolding serenely. And then, on 12 February, a group of twenty scientists from 13 countries published a memorandum demanding the immediate rehabilitation of researcher Pusztai, and expressing support for his tentative conclusion, funded by a \$2.4 million grant from the British government's Scottish Office, that GM potatoes had damaged the kidneys, thymus, spleen and gut of laboratory rats after only ten days of feeding trials, and weakened their immune systems.

That memorandum ignited a firestorm of protest in Britain that has already forced the government to postpone authorising the first commercial GM crops for at least a year, until autumn 2000, and may soon lead to a 3-year moratorium. Last week, the European Commission blocked the sale or growth anywhere in Europe of two GM cottons that Monsanto already markets freely in the U.S., its third and fourth decisions in a row blocking the release into the environment of a genetically modified organism.

To make matters worse, on Wednesday Monsanto was fined over \$25,000 by a British court for 'genetic pollution': inadequate barriers between an experimental field of GM oilseed rape and adjacent fields of natural crops. The free ride in public opinion is over — but what are the real risks?

The direct fears can be summed up under three headings: 'Frankenstein foods', genetic pollution, and 'Green Concrete.' In each case, the anxieties arise not so much from what is known, but rather from what is NOT yet known about the possible consequences of this massive and ultra-rapid move into GM crops. The latter two concerns have been relatively easy for the biotechnology industry to dismiss, since they tend to divide people along familiar lines, with the 'pragmatists' usually outnumbering the greens. If the end result of adding alien genes to create crops that are resistant to herbicides and insect infestations is fields where there are no other plants, few insects, and so hardly any birds, just the GM monoculture (the 'Green Concrete' phenomenon)... well, modern intensive agriculture has already travelled a long way down that road. And most people never see the fields anyway.

Same goes, pretty much, for 'genetic pollution.' Scientists and environmentalists may worry about the risk that the altered genes that confer resistance to herbicides might get into other plants as well, creating a generation of 'super-weeds' that require bigger and bigger doses of weed-killer to control. It was Monsanto's failure to ensure adequate safeguards against that danger (a 6-metre gap between GM and normal crops) that got it fined by a British court this week. But once again, it is too obscure and distant a danger to mobilise popular opinion — whereas any suggestion that GM foods are a threat to human health is (in PR terms) an absolute killer.

The tests that have now caused such alarm were begun in 1996 Pusztai, an international authority on lectins (natural poisons that plants produce as a defence against predators).



The days when vegetables were supposed to be good for you may be over soon (file photo)

Competing against 28 other tenders, he won an official contract to conduct research into the human nutritional consequences of GM foods — which, as a former senior Scottish Office official involved in commissioning the project recently explained to the 'Guardian' newspaper, were receiving 'little regard' at the time.

Pusztai, a respected scientist with 35 years at the Rowett Research Institute and 270 scientific papers to his credit, probably won the competition because of his expertise with lectins, which are natural candidates for genetic manipulation since they confer protection against insects. He had the biology department of Durham University prepare a GM potato strain that incorporated genetic instructions for the manufacture of lectins, and began feeding it to rats. At the same time, of course, he fed another 'control' group of rats with normal potatoes that were simply spiked with lectins.

All the rats suffered some damage, since lectins are poisonous — but the stunted growth and damage to the immune system was worse in those given the GM potatoes. Moreover, the researchers began to suspect that the culprit was not the lectin gene itself, but rather the 'virus promoter,' the 'light switch' which GM companies use to activate the inserted genes. And the particular promoter used in the potatoes was the cauliflower mosaic virus — which has already been used in most GM products on the market.

These were highly provisional and preliminary results, but Pusztai (by no means a dogmatic opponent of genetic engineering)

was alarmed enough to seek further research funding — which was refused. He was given permission by the Institute's director, Philip James, to speak to British television programmes in January of last year, and again in April. On the latter occasion, Pusztai said he would not eat GM foods himself and that it was "very, very unfair to use our fellow citizens as guinea pigs."

In the ensuing outcry James defended Pusztai on the first day — and then on the second day suspended him, condemned his research techniques, made him sign a gagging order, and forced him to retire. An audit report conducted by the Rowett Institute last August, while exonerating Pusztai of the charge that his research methodology was bad, did not link GM potatoes to any health risks. But Pusztai, who was then given access again to his own research data, strongly reconfirmed his findings.

There the matter rested until 12 February, when 20 scientists (including two who had worked at the Rowett Institute) published their letter of support for Pusztai. And then all hell broke loose in the British media.

One signatory, Ronald Finn, a former president of the British Society of Allergy and Environmental Medicine, told a London press conference: "We in the U.K. have just had a very narrow escape following the epidemic of mad cow disease. I think we have probably got away with it. We have been warned once, and we should be extremely careful to monitor any further major change in food technology."

Another signatory, Jonathan Rhodes, professor of medicine at Liverpool University, went further. "One key problem that keeps coming back time and again is that regulation of food is nothing like as strict as regulation of drugs. And when you start tinkering around with the genetic structure of food, you have to move towards thinking of food products as pharmaceuticals."

So what happens now that the cat is comprehensively out of the bag? For there is not just a lot of money at stake here. There is also the conviction on the part of various Western governments, most notably those of the United States, Canada and Britain, that GM technologies will bring them enormous trade benefits in the next century, and therefore must suffer no major restriction or delay.

In Britain, GM crops are probably a lost cause, even though Prime Minister Tony Blair backs them enthusiastically. He does so because biotechnology firms contribute generously to the Labour Party, because his friend Clinton phones him up from Washington to lean on him, and because he genuinely believes that GM technologies will assist in a British post-industrial renaissance. Government officials and ministers have met with companies involved in GM foods 81 times since Labour was elected in 1997 (23 with Monsanto alone), and more than \$22 million has been earmarked in aid for British biotech firms.

As part of the damage control exercise, Blair even let it be known that he himself ate GM foods and believed them to be safe (though the spokesman refused to be drawn on whether the Blair children also ate them). But it won't help. The British government is now in full retreat before an aroused public opinion, and neither threats nor blandishments from Washington will keep it in line, for now it is becoming a question of political survival.

Recent decisions in Strasbourg suggest that the tide in the rest of Europe is running in the same direction. Last week, the European Parliament voted to impose strict corporate liability and mandatory insurance on companies that release GM organisms into the environment, and for much stronger rules on the segregation and labelling of GM foods.

In the United States, however, turning the tide is much more difficult. Monsanto, which gives large donations to both political parties and to congressmen on food safety committees, has become a virtual retirement home for members of the Clinton administration.

Trade and environmental protection administrators and other Clinton appointees have left to take up lucrative positions on Monsanto's board, while Monsanto and other biotech executives pass through the same revolving door to take up positions in the administration and its regulatory bodies. (Clinton has even praised Monsanto by name in a State of the Union Address.)

"The Food and Drug Administration," says Betty Martini of the consumer group Mission Possible, "is so closely linked to the biotech industry now that it could be described as their Washington branch office." And the industry has got its way: U.S. law requires that no GM foods be labelled as such, and fourteen states have even been persuaded to pass virtually identical 'veggie libel' laws preventing the 'spreading of false and damaging information about food.'

So whether GM foods are safe or not, most Americans will be eating them for a long time to come. They will have difficulty even



Tasty! But are we being conned? (file photo)

in finding out which foods contain GM products (though most processed foods already do), and they may discover that publicly questioning the safety of any specific GM food leads to a close encounter with a large firm of lawyers. In the rest of the world, however, the backlash is growing fast.

This week in Cartagena, Colombia, diplomats from 175 countries open the final stage of negotiations for a Biosafety Protocol that is meant to regulate the movement of GM products between countries.

The biotech industries, with strong backing from the U.S. and Canadian governments, want a weak treaty that gives no country the right to keep GM products out in order to shelter its population from the social and economic impact of industrialised, capital-intensive forms of agriculture, or even on health and environmental grounds.

But the Europeans are starting to waver,

'There is not just a lot of money at stake... there is also the conviction on the part of various Western governments, most notably those of the U.S., Canada and Britain, that GM technologies will bring them enormous trade benefits in the next century, and therefore must suffer no major restriction or delay'

and large numbers of NGOs are in Colombia to push for a protocol that gives countries the right to say no to the import and release of GM organisms, requires a full assessment of the possible effects on farmers' livelihoods as well as health and environmental impacts, and makes biotech multinationals responsible for the legal consequences (including compensation) if something does go wrong. And most of the Third World has already figured out what side it is on.

Whatever the real problems with GM foods, the strategy for their high-speed introduction throughout the world is shaping up as one of the great PR disasters of all time. Public suspicion outside North America is now reaching crippling levels, and the reason is not at all mysterious. It is because the biotech firms literally tried to shove the stuff down people's throats without giving them either choice or information.

In the words of Malcolm Walker, chairman of the British foodstore chain Iceland Foods (which has now banned all GM foods from its shelves), the U.S. food giants' tactic of mixing GM and ordinary soya to make sure it was all contaminated was "secretive, devious, and a terrible thing to do. People want food they can trust."

The writer is a London-based independent journalist whose articles are published in 45 countries.

[illegible]

Daily Beat

A review of news from the Arabic Press

Export and Finance Bank boosts net pretax profit by 60 per cent in 1998

**** NET PRETAX** profit generated by the Export and Finance Bank last year reached JD2.3 million, a 60 per cent increase over the JD1.43 million recorded in 1997. Audited financial statements, which were approved by the Central Bank, showed the total balance sheet at the end of 1998 exceeding the JD86 million mark.

According to the financial statements, the shareholders' equity rose to over JD17.7 million and the portfolio of credit facilities shot up to JD42.3 million. Customers' deposits increased by JD11.6 million to JD37 million and cash deposits (margins) soared by 155 per cent to more than JD13 million.

The profit and loss statement revealed a total of about JD3.8 million in net earnings from interest and commission and an increase in general reserves and retained earnings to the JD746,500 level.

Meanwhile, the Export and Finance Bank will launch three-month certificates of deposit (CDs) worth JD3.0 million (\$4.22 million) on March 9, 1999, maturing on June 9, 1999, with an annual interest rate of 9.6 per cent and six-month CDs worth JD2.0 million (\$2.82 million) on March 9, 1999, maturing on Sept. 9, 1999, with an annual interest rate of 9.9 per cent. The CDs are denominated in multiples of JD5,000 (\$7,000). Although the bank will not repurchase the issue, the CDs are negotiable, and may be transferred to another account holder upon demand.

The CDs, the only issue currently

offered by a Jordanian bank, were marketed in order to attract longer term funding and direct the balance sheet structure. "Although the bank has a wide and diversified base of depositors, a more stable source of funding is needed to support the asset/liability management of the bank's portfolio and provide funding for longer term loans. The CDs give us the ability to select exact maturity dates to correspond with future cash requirements," Ali Al Husry, chairman and chief executive officer of the Export and Finance Bank said.

The bank has been building up its funding structure to accommodate its growing client base. "We are pursuing a plan aimed at attracting private and public sector deposits with competitive interest rates. In the coming year, we intend to introduce various other instruments to attract a wider and more diversified base of depositors as a more stable source of funding," Al Husry said.

The Export and Finance Bank's commercial activities are focused on the conventional role as providers of working capital and trade finance, whereas investment banking services are being introduced to help facilitate access to longer term financing. With the introduction of various savings and investment instruments, the Export and Finance Bank will be able to further mobilise savings in favour of productive activities, and encourage private capital inflows.

Lebanon launches Middle East's first Eurobond

LONDON (R) — Lebanon became the first country in the Middle East to borrow in euros, reinforcing the new European unit's status as global currency and underlining its attraction for emerging market borrowers.

The deal, aimed at diversifying Lebanon's investor base, was seen as an important test of investor appetite — both European appetite for Lebanese debt and appetite among Lebanon's traditional Middle East investor base for euros.

Strong demand for the planned dual-currency deal, originally intended to comprise \$250 million in dollar bonds and 100 million in euros, meant the euro tranche was increased to 300 million euros and the dollar tranche downsized to \$200 million.

"The aim of this deal was to diversify Lebanon's traditional dollar-oriented investor base and to test demand in the new European currency," said Dan Vallumarescu, director of emerging market new issues at Merrill Lynch.

"The result has been highly successful and we have been able to launch the first euro deal from the Middle East not only in a bigger size than originally anticipated but also at an extremely tight spread."

Lebanon, which is rated BAA1 by Moody's Investors Service and BB-minus by Standard and Poor's Corp., priced the euro tranche at a spread of 393 basis points over OATS, only slightly wider than its dollar tranche, which was priced at a spread of 355 basis points over U.S. treasury bonds.

Lebanon launched the Middle East's first Eurobond in 1994 and now has around \$2.5 billion outstanding. All outstanding bonds are in dollars except a 250 million mark bond from 1997.

Lebanon's dollarised economy and the high number of dollar-rich Lebanese expatriates mean that its traditional investor base has generally preferred dollar paper. A strong bid for Lebanese paper from local investors means that it is able to raise funds more cheaply than its similarly rated peers.

"Some of Lebanon's funding advantage in dollars has clearly transferred into euros," said an emerging debt trader at a European bank. He added that the strong performance of Lebanon's bonds in the secondary market had encouraged some relative value European investors to buy the bond.

"Lebanese bonds tend to be bought by loyal Middle East investors who hold them to maturity. The promise of a strong and stable secondary market performance is likely to have attracted a number of European investors who would not normally buy a credit such as Lebanon at such a tight spread," he explained.

Merrill Lynch officials estimated that around 40 per cent of the euro-denominated bonds sold to European investors — mainly institutional investors in France, Germany and Switzerland, with the remainder to Middle East investors.

The dollar bonds were placed almost exclusively with Lebanon's traditional Middle East investor base.

Meanwhile, Bank of Lebanon Governor Riad Salameh said the government's 1999 budget should include a \$2 billion borrowing programme to counter a budget deficit expected to exceed 40 per cent of spending.

Lebanon's parliament last year approved a \$2 billion foreign credit scheme which was exhausted by a dollar and euro-denominated sovereign bond issue worth \$550 million.

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mourn with deep grief the late
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(May God bless his soul)
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and the Royal Hashemite Family
heartfelt condolences and sympathy imploring
God Almighty to bless the late King's soul

HOROSCOPE

FORECAST FOR TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 1999

By Linda C. Black, Tribune Media Services, Inc.

ARIES: (March 21 to April 19) There's lots of scumblin' floating around today, but don't take it seriously. Everybody's got an opinion. How can you tell which one is the truth? Well, right now it's going to be difficult, because all the facts are not in. So instead of making a decision now, just continue to gather as much information as you can.

TAURUS: (April 20 to May 20) You like to know where every penny goes, and today that'll be a real challenge. There's money coming in from unexpected sources and money going out for unanticipated costs. You'll need imagination, but maybe not control. Did you ever consider that you should be steering, not trying to control everything that's going on?

GEMINI: (May 21 to June 21) The moon in your sign makes you very powerful, but the sun in Pisces could draw you up short. This is a non-verbal sign. Pisceans communicate without speaking; and you, of course, are the sign of verbal communication. Today, if you want to be really wise, do less talking and more listening. That's what the smart money will be doing.

CANCER: (June 22 to July 22) You may feel like somebody's leaning over your shoulder, watching your every move and taking notes. Well, you're looking great, but you may be a little self-conscious. If you can keep your mind on business, you'll do fine. But if you let your personal life encroach on company time, there could be a problem.

LEO: (July 23 to August 22) You naturally rise to the position of the leader in almost any team you're on. That doesn't mean the others always mind you, however. Today, be careful to listen. Don't just tell others what to do. Ask them what they think should be done. Your chances of success will improve dramatically the more people you relate to in this manner.

VIRGO: (August 23 to September 22) Just when you think everything's figured out, somebody will want to change it all around again. You prefer a nice routine, so you know what's expected of you. Instead of arguing with how things are, use these conditions to your advantage. There are a few changes you've been thinking about suggesting, and now's the perfect time.

LIBRA: (September 23 to October 22) If you're like most Libras, you weigh things in the balance. You figure out all the reasons for and all those against, and eventually the answer becomes obvious. But this time, things could look tiled. You could find yourself unable to decide which way to go. If so, this old adage will most likely work again. Follow the path with heart.

SCORPIO: (October 23 to November 21) Be careful with your money today. A misunderstanding or accident could cost more than you expected. A misunderstanding over money with somebody you love is a distinct possibility, so take care. If money is involved, count to 10 before you express an opinion, and listen before you talk. And read the fine print.

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22 to December 21) Someone's yanking your string today, trying to make you think or make you change. You don't know whether to get mad or excited. Actually, whatever changes occur now should be beneficial, but pay attention. You don't want to sub your toe while you're dancing in the rain and wind up not only in love but also in plaster cast.

CAPRICORN: (December 22 to January 19) Things are not as they are supposed to be, as they used to be, or as you thought they were, so watch out. It looks like somebody's trying to pull a trick on you. If you're wheeling and dealing, take care. Make sure you read all the fine print on any contract you're thinking about signing, that's for sure.

AQUARIUS: (January 20 to February 18) You might be feeling a little frisky and lucky, but don't get carried away or pretend to be grander than you are. It looks like you want to impress someone and take him or her out to a really great dinner that costs more than your rent. If that's an exaggeration, you can figure out what parts of it are useful, and discard the rest.

PISCES: (February 19 to March 20) You could have a really lucky break concerning money today, but something else is going to be a problem. Looks like someone who's near and dear to you will say something that hurts your feelings. If that happens, don't despair. He or she probably didn't mean it, and besides, you're the lucky winner, right?

Birthstone of February: Amethyst — Onyx

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BANKS INDEX	285.390	285.390	-0.41%
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INSURANCE INDEX	124.740	124.740	+0.41%
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JO. TANNING	5.50	5.70	+0.00%
ARAB PHARMACEUTICAL	3.00	3.20	+0.65%
CERAMIC IND	1.320	1.30	0.00%
TOBACCO & CIGARET	1.550	1.570	+1.29%
ARAB CHEMICAL DETER	7.20	7.30	+0.28%
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SULPHO - CHEMICALS	0.50	0.500	0.00%
ARAB CENTER FOR PHAR	1.30	1.300	-0.75%
EL-ZAY	1.90	1.90	0.00%
UNIVERSAL MODERN IND	0.10	0.10	0.00%
IND. RESOURCES	0.30	0.30	+2.33%
NEW CAPLES	0.90	0.900	0.00%
NTL ALUMINIUM	1.90	0.90	+2.53%
INDUSTRY INDEX	94.150	94.150	+0.48%
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ARAB INTL TRADE	1.70	1.70	+5.36%
CENTURY	1.130	1.130	+0.84%
NAMICO	0.710	0.710	+4.78%
MIDDLE EAST PHAR	1.10	1.10	+3.28%
UNION TOBACCO	1.30	1.30	+5.89%
INTL CERAMIC	0.50	0.50	+6.63%
NTL POULTRY	0.570	0.570	+3.51%
NTLRI DAI	0.70	0.70	0.00%
HOUSING BK FUND N.A.V	10.000	9.90	-5.00%
GRAND INDEX	172.37	172.37	-0.13%

Pacers keep Nets reeling

INDIANAPOLIS (R) — Mark Jackson's nine-foot leaper in the lane with six-tenths of a second remaining — his only basket of the game — lifted the Indiana Pacers to a wild 80-79 victory over the reeling New Jersey Nets on Sunday.

Indiana staggered to the finish, missing 14 straight shots in a 7-57 drought before Reggie Miller and Chris Mullin hit consecutive 3-pointers.

For a 78-75 lead with 46 seconds left, Mullin finished with 21 points and Miller added 18.

The Nets have dropped six of their last seven games.

In Minneapolis, Joe Smith had a season-high 30 points and 13 rebounds and Kevin Garnett added 22 points, 19 boards and seven assists as the Minnesota Timberwolves cooled off the Sacramento Kings, 102-90.

Stephen Marbury contributed 23 points and 15 assists and only one turnover for Minnesota, which has won seven of its first nine games.

Chris Webber scored 20 points and Tariq Abdul-Wahad added 14 for Sacramento.

In New York, the Knicks beat the Chicago Bulls 79-63 in a boring game, notable for the Bulls franchise-record fewest points.

Allan Houston scored 25 points on 10-of-15 shooting from the field and Kurt Thomas added 17 points for the Knicks, who targeted the Bulls during the Michael Jordan era but consistently came up short.

"It was not Knicks-Bulls of old without Scottie (Pippen), Michael and

Dennis (Rodman), but we still have a job to do," said New York's Patrick Ewing, who hit just 4-of-15 shots from the field and finished with 10 points and seven blocked shots.

Brent Barry led the bulls with 19 points but his teammates combined to hit just 17-of-56 shots from the field. Toni Kukoc had 16 points, hitting just 6-of-19 shots.

The Bulls' previous scoring low point was in 1994 when they scored just 63

points when Jordan was in his first retirement.

In San Antonio, Tim Duncan and Mario Elie picked up the slack for foul-plagued David Robinson as the San Antonio Spurs rolled to an 85-64 victory over the Detroit Pistons, who were held to the lowest total in franchise history.

Duncan recorded his fourth straight double-double with 17 points and 14 rebounds while Elie added 16 points in his first start of the season, helping San

Antonio (5-5) snap a two-game losing streak and climb back to the .500 mark.

"They get tired of me talking," Elie added. "We have talent but we have to believe. It takes more than talent alone. It takes heart to win." Robinson scored just 10 points, playing only 15 minutes after picking up his fourth foul in the first minute of the third quarter.

In Washington, Mitch Richmond scored 25 points and Rod Strickland just missed a triple-double as the Wizards won their third straight game with an 86-75 victory over the Celtics, who benched three starters.

Guard Kenny Anderson, forward Ron Mercer and centre Tony Battie all began the game on the bench and entered midway through the first quarter. Starting in their place were Dana Barros, Bruce Bowen and Andrew DeClercq, who did very little to slow down the Wizards.

"It was just something I tried because of (Washington's) quickness," said Celtics coach Rick Pitino.

Barros shot 2-of-12 and had just two assists. Bowen scored just three points and DeClercq contributed five. Anderson managed six points, while Mercer scored 17 points and Battie pulled down 11 rebounds.

In Toronto, the Raptors' rookie Vince Carter scored a season-high 27 points in a 102-87 victory over the Vancouver Grizzlies before a sellout crowd of 19,800.

With the game tied 72-72, Carter dunked to ignite a 10-2 run with 9:14 remaining. He capped the spurt with a 3-pointer that gave

the Raptors an 82-74 cushion with 5:28 left.

Vancouver closed to 88-85 but Toronto opened a 99-85 cushion on Charles Oakley's two foul shots with 22 seconds to play.

"I was just trying to take some pressure off the other guys," said Carter, who was 11-of-16 from the field, including 3-of-4 from 3-point range. "Once I hit a couple, I just got into a groove. I'll do whatever I have to do." In Orlando, the Magic, powered by the three-pronged backcourt of Penny Hardaway, Nick Anderson and reserve Darrell Armstrong, remained unbeaten at home with a 109-83 trouncing of the Houston Rockets.

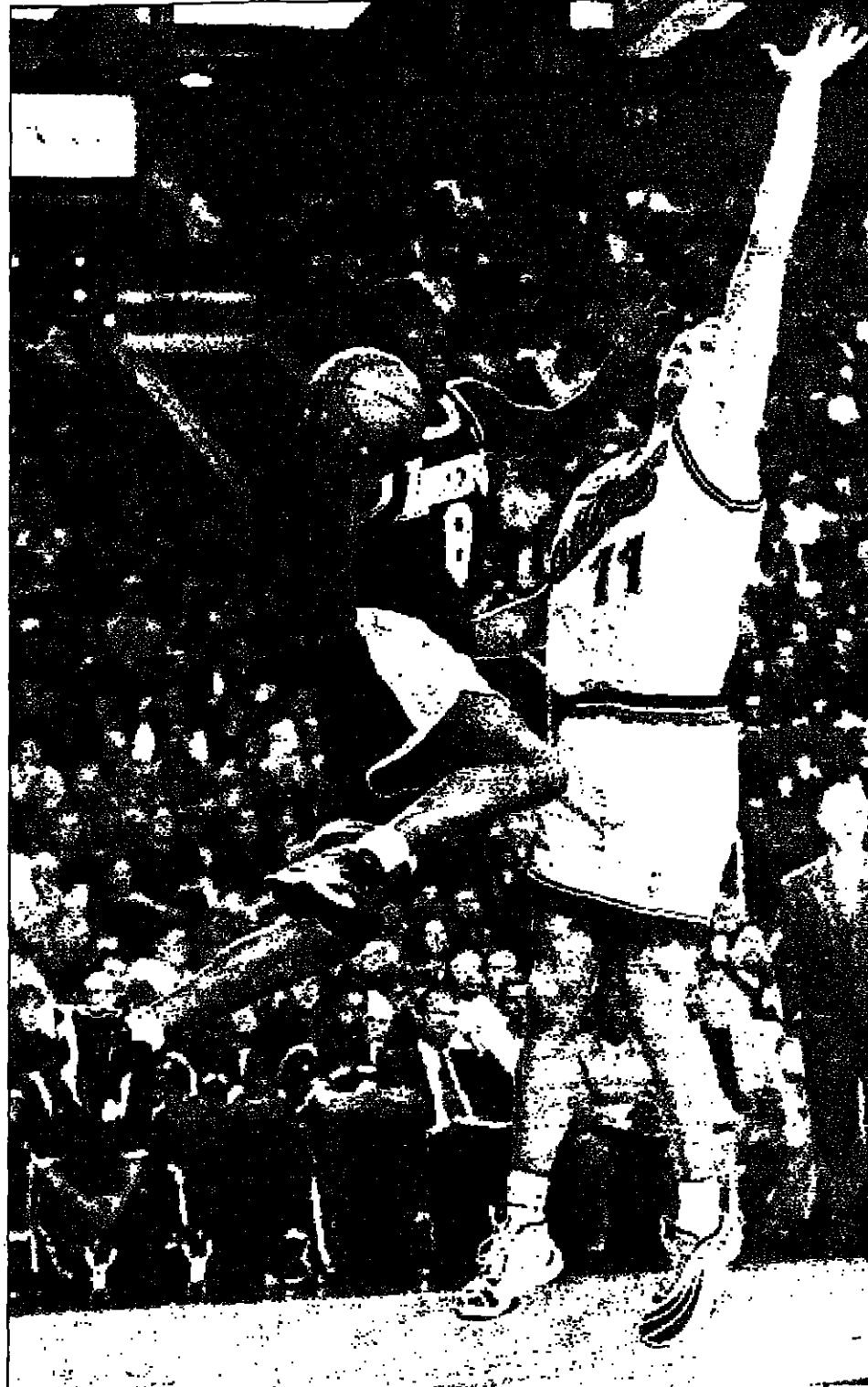
Hardaway had 16 points, 11 assists and four of Orlando's 17 steals. The 6-6 Anderson collected 19 points, scoring from both the post and the arc.

Hakeem Olajuwon had 21 points and 10 rebounds and Scottie Pippen added 19 points for the Rockets.

In Seattle, Gary Payton led five players in double figures with 26 points as the Seattle SuperSonics rebounded from a 30-point loss and kept the rival Los Angeles Lakers frustrated on national television with a 92-89 victory.

SuperSonics centre Olden Polynice outplayed superstar Shaquille O'Neal for much of the game. He had 15 points and 17 rebounds for Seattle, which led by at least five points throughout the fourth quarter.

O'Neal finished with 27 points on 11-of-24 shooting.



Los Angeles Laker Eddie Jones (L) looks to dish off a pass against Seattle SuperSonics Detlef Schrempf (R) during first half of play February 21 in Seattle (AFP photo)

Roma fans mourn scoreless draw at Fiorentina

FLORENCE, Italy (R) — AS Roma supporters, whose hatred for Lazio generates the fiercest derby in Serie A, have never forgotten how a late goal against Ascoli 24 years ago saved their arch-rivals from relegation.

On Monday the Roma faithful were in mourning again after their side's scoreless draw at second-placed Fiorentina put the old enemy two points clear in Serie A for the first time since 27 October 1974.

After 22 matches, Lazio are top on 45 points, with Fiorentina dropping to second, level with AC Milan, for the first time since last November. Roma are a distant eighth, 13 points behind Lazio.

In the streets of the Italian capital on Sunday night Lazio fans were singing the popular hit of the 1980s, written to celebrate Roma's 1983 league championship: "Grazie, Roma." "The Roman axis works," proclaimed Gazzetta dello Sport in a front-page editorial. ("Coach Zdenek) Zeman fields the perfect team to block Fiorentina and Lazio

do the rest, defeating Inter (1-0)," Corriere dello Sport added further salt to Roma's wounds: "Lazio have found a precious ally in Roma. A bizarre twist of destiny means that Lazio are top for the first time in 25 years thanks to their cousins." To make matters worse, Roma enjoyed the better of the match at the Artemio Franchi stadium and would have claimed their first away win since April 1998 but for the goal-keeping of Francesco Toldo and the woodwork.

Brazilian striker Paolo Sergio hit the post in the first half while Toldo, playing his 300th match in Serie A, saved bravely at the feet of Sergio's compatriot Fabio Junior and Damiano Tommasi after the break.

When Aldair's last-minute header finally left former international Toldo stranded, substitute Anselmo Robbati cleared off the line.

"A favour for Lazio? I don't think so. We were playing for ourselves," said Zeman, a former Lazio coach. "I didn't breathe a sigh of relief at the final whistle." Unlike Fiorentina

manager Giovanni Trapattoni, whose side's championship campaign is losing momentum after two goalless home draws, to Milan and Roma, and last week's 1-0 defeat at in-form Udinese.

"We did the most we possibly could," a resigned Trapattoni said of a side missing suspended defenders Moreno Torricelli and Giovanni Falcone, midfielder Sandro Cois and the irreplaceable Batistuta.

Without their inspirational Argentine captain, who had scored 18 goals in 20 matches before twisting knee ligaments two weeks ago against Milan, Fiorentina have failed to find the net in 277 minutes of Serie A action.

Batistuta's replacement Carmine Esposito failed to make an impression against Roma, although Andrea Tarozzi did hit the post in the 82nd minute and Robbati dribbled through the visitors' defence in the dying seconds before putting a shot just wide.

Not even Edmundo could make up for the absence of Batistuta.

The Brazilian, whose refusal to postpone a trip to the Rio Carnival after Batistuta's injury, earned the wrath of players and fans, had the chance to redeem himself in the first half.

But, with the goal at his mercy six metres out, Edmundo's shot looked as though it had come straight out of last Sunday's photos of him playing soccer volleyball on the Copacabana beach — sailing high over the net.

"He tried hard but the popular court of the people has suspended its verdict on Edmundo," one commentator said.

In the absence of Batistuta, apparently making a quicker than expected recovery, Serie A is doing much the same with Fiorentina's championship chances.

"Is it 'arrivederci' or 'addio' to the top of the table?" asked Gazzetta dello Sport.

No doubt Roma fans would prefer the former, hoping to see Fiorentina back at the top in place of hated Lazio.

United States 2, Chile 1

FORT LAUDERDALE, Florida (AP) — The U.S. national team said goodbye to captain Thomas Dooley and welcomed an encouraging glimpse into the future.

Ben Olsen and Eddie Lewis, two members of a massive youth movement under new coach Bruce Arena, scored their first international goals as the United States beat Chile 2-1 Sunday.

The result kept the Americans unbeaten in four games since Arena took over the national programme, including a stunning 3-0 win over Germany two weeks ago in Jacksonville.

"I will miss being around the young players on the national team," said Dooley, a veteran of two World Cups who is ending his international career after 81 appearances. "Otherwise I feel good about leaving space for younger players. I won't be around (for the 2002 World Cup), so it makes sense to step out at a high level." The U.S. youngsters showed a superior level of play against Chile, taking another step in helping rid memories of the team's disastrous World Cup performance last year.

"It's a great feeling to get my first goal and help the team get another win," Olsen said. "We're on a roll and we want to keep it going." Sunday's lineup included just four players from the squad that faced Germany. Still, it was good enough for the U.S.



Manuel Neira of Chile (R) grabs the shirt of Richie Williams of the U.S. as they go for the ball during first half of their friendly match February 21 in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. The US won 2-1 (AFP photo)

Team's second win under Arena to go with two ties.

"This was a day where we gave our young players in our programme another taste of international soccer," Arena said. "I think this result speaks well for our future." Lewis broke a 1-1 tie in the 65th minute with a shot that deflected off Chilean defender Pablo Contreras. That came less than a minute after Chile's Roberto Cardes tied the game with a left-footed blast from 32 yards.

Olsen, who played for Arena last season at D.C. United, scored the game's opening goal in the 58th minute before 14,896 fans at Lockhart stadium.

"Both Ben and I just slid into open spaces, not sure where the ball was going, and we made the most of it," Lewis said.

"Today was an opportunity to prove that the

Germany game was no fluke." Chile coach Nelson Acosta fielded a team featuring six players getting their first international starts. The best of the group was 20-year-old midfielder David Pizarro, who nearly caught U.S. goalkeeper Zach Thornton napping in the second minute with a 40-yard blast that forced a diving save.

Acosta said he was pleased despite the result, because Chile was playing just its second game since last summer's World Cup.

"This is a young team and we only had two days training together, so overall I'm happy," Acosta said.

The first half was remarkable only for the five yellow cards handed out by Mexican referee Pascal Rebollo. By game's end, the teams had combined for 60 fouls and six cautions.

Source says Tyson outburst came after being taken off antidepressants

LAS VEGAS (AP) — Mike Tyson had been taken off an antidepressant drug at the direction of a jail physician two days before he became enraged and threw a television set against some bars in a Maryland jail, a source close to the fighter told the Associated Press.

The incident prompted jail officials to lock Tyson in an isolation cell at the Montgomery County Detention Center, and could lead to anything from a reprimand to further jail time for the former heavyweight champion.

A source close to Tyson said jail officials had stopped giving him the antidepressant Zoloft two days before the Friday afternoon incident. The medication was stopped after Tyson refused to let a prison psychologist examine him.

Tyson refused on the grounds he had already undergone extensive psychological examinations by doctors at Massachusetts General Hospital in October and was under the contin-

uing care of Dr. Richard Goldberg, who heads the psychiatric programme at Georgetown University, the source said.

Tyson had been taking Zoloft on a daily basis for the past four months, except for the week prior to his Jan. 16 fight with Francois Botha. Tyson was weaned gradually from the drug during that week, and began taking it again the day after the fight, the source, who asked not to be identified, told the AP.

Neither jail officials nor Goldberg could be reached for comment. A call to the home of Tyson's Washington, D.C., attorney, Paul Kemp, was not returned.

Tyson was in a common area with other prisoners on Friday and was talking on the phone when a guard came in and hung the phone up, the source said.

The action enraged Tyson, who picked up the television set and threw it against some bars. Tyson, the source said, immediately apologised

and offered to pay for the TV.

Doctors at Massachusetts General testified at Tyson's licensing hearing before the Nevada Athletic Commission in October that the former heavyweight champion was often depressed but that his mood swings could be controlled if he took the proper medication.

On the medication, Tyson was cheerful and cooperative in interviews with reporters when training for the Botha fight in Phoenix in December. The week of the fight, though, he was combative at times and engaged in a profanity-laced tirade against a New York television reporter four days before the fight.

Tyson was being held in an 8-by-5-foot isolation cell pending a hearing either Monday or Tuesday on a citation for destruction of county property in the jail in the Washington suburb.

TODAY AT	CINEMA TEL:463-4144	CINEMA TEL:463-4144	CINEMA TEL:569-228	CINEMA TEL:567-420	CINEMA TEL:593-4793	CINEMA TEL:593-4793	Higham Yanes Theatre TEL:462515
	PHILADELPHIA '1'	PHILADELPHIA '2'	PLAZA	CONCORDE	GALLERIA 1	GALLERIA 2	
	Bruce Willis ... in	Adel Imam, Wafa' Amer & Kamal Shinawi ... in	Comedian Adel Emmam ... in	Adel Imam, Wafa' Amer & Kamal Shinawi ... in	ABDOUN www.cns.com.jo/Galleria	ABDOUN www.cns.com.jo/Galleria	
	MERCURY RISING Shows: 10:30, 8:30, 6:15, 3:30, 12:30	ALWAD MAHROUS TBA' AL WAZIR Shows: 10:30, 8:30, 6:15, 3:30, 12:30	AL ZA'EEM Shows: 12:15, 3:15, 6:30, 9:45	TBA' AL WAZIR Shows: 12:30, 2:30, 6:30, 8:30, 10:30 CONCORDE '2' Sleepwalkers Shows: 3:30, 5:30 only	EDDIE MURPHY DR. DOLITTLE Shows: 3:30, 6:30, 8:30, 10:30	SINGLES Shows: 3:00, 6:30, 8:30, 10:30	CLOSED FOR DECORATION

Listings for films and showing times as received by cinemas and their advertising agencies.

MEMPHIS, Tennessee (AP) — Andre Agassi's three straight titles at the ATP Tour's Memphis tournament were a surprise to many. Agassi, who reached the final of the tournament, said he was "a little more confident" than he was in the second round. He said he was "a little more confident" than he was in the second round. He said he was "a little more confident" than he was in the second round.

Haas, who held the No. 1 ranking in 1992 and 1993, said he was "a little more confident" than he was in the second round. He said he was "a little more confident" than he was in the second round. He said he was "a little more confident" than he was in the second round.

LONDON, England (AP) — Yevgeny Kafelnikov, the world's No. 1 tennis player, said he was "a little more confident" than he was in the second round. He said he was "a little more confident" than he was in the second round. He said he was "a little more confident" than he was in the second round.

SYDNEY, Australia (AP) — Austra's Olympic team returned to competition on Saturday, with Cathy Freeman leading the way. Freeman, who missed the first 100 metres race in the 100 metres race, led the way. Freeman, who missed the first 100 metres race in the 100 metres race, led the way.

The Australian team led the way in the 100 metres race. Freeman, who missed the first 100 metres race in the 100 metres race, led the way. Freeman, who missed the first 100 metres race in the 100 metres race, led the way.

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Haas appreciates compliments, but would rather play than talk

MEMPHIS, Tennessee (AP) — Tommy Haas is heading in the right direction — up.

"There's only three tournaments that I've played this year."

"There's still a lot more tournaments to go, and I'll talk more about how this year went for me when it's the end," said Haas.

So far, he's reached the final in Auckland, New Zealand, the semifinals of the Australian Open, and capped his run at the Kroger St. Jude indoor tournament Sunday with a 6-4, 6-1 victory over an ailing Jim Courier for his first ATP tour title.

Even Courier's sprained left foot couldn't diminish Haas' happiness with the victory.

"I'm glad it came against a former No. 1. ... It really makes it special," the 20-year-old German said.

Haas is 14-2 in match play after taking time out to rest at the end of last year. He also switched from a Head racket to a Dunlop, which has given him extra power on his serve and groundstrokes.

The victory moved his ranking from No. 22 to a career-high No. 16.

To reach the final, Haas upset top-seeded Todd Martin.

Courier, who held the No. 1 ranking for 58 weeks in 1992 and 1993, didn't feel that he gave Haas a strong test Sunday because his foot kept him from moving. He tried to overpower Haas with his serve and won his first service game with four aces. But Haas eventually took advantage of Courier's lack of mobility.

Courier had three chances to break Haas in the seventh game, but failed. Then Courier double-faulted three times while leading 40-0, and Haas broke him for the first set.

The second set went more quickly as Haas broke Courier twice, the second time off another double fault. Haas served out for his second career victory over Courier, finishing the match by converting 93 per cent of his first serves along with 12 aces.

Haas said he's ready to put in the work needed to attain his goals: winning a Grand Slam tournament and eventually being ranked No. 1.

"You can't say I want to be No. 1. It's something that happens eventually," in Rotterdam, Netherlands, Australian Open winner Yevgeny Kafelnikov beat Tim Henman 6-2, 7-6 (7-3) to capture the Abn-Amro tournament. The victory put Kafelnikov in position to move ahead of Pete Sampras in the race for the World No. 1 ranking. He trails Sampras by 85 points.

In Hanover, Germany, Jana Novotna finally won the Faber Grand Prix in her fourth consecutive trip to the final of the WTA Tour event. Novotna beat Venus Williams 6-4, 6-4, finally converting her third match point to win her 26th career title.

In Bogota, Colombia, Fabiola Zuluaga won her first WTA Tour title in her hometown, dousing Christina Papadaki of Greece 6-1, 6-3.

Kafelnikov aims at No. 1

LONDON (AP) — Yevgeny Kafelnikov could displace Pete Sampras as the World's No. 1 player at this week's Guardian Direct Open in London.

Kafelnikov has 3,637 ranking points and trails Sampras by 58. Sampras is not playing this week.

The Russian won the Australian Open three weeks ago — his second Grand Slam title — and picked up his second season victory Sunday, beating Tim Henman in the final of an ATP indoor event in Rotterdam.

"I want to be No. 1 and I'm going to be trying my best in

London to get there," Kafelnikov said after beating Henman.

Kafelnikov, who has never held the No. 1 spot, opens play Tuesday in London in a first-round match against Magnus Gustafsson.

If Kafelnikov reaches the semifinals — and beats Thomas Johansson in the quarterfinals — he will take over the No. 1 spot.

Kafelnikov is also guaranteed the No. 1 spot by reaching the final — no matter whom he beats en route, ATP spokesman David Law said.

Sampras has spent a total of

260 weeks atop the ATP rankings.

Ivan Lendl holds the record for most weeks at No. 1 (270) followed by Jimmy Connors.

Sampras was displaced twice last season as No. 1 by Chilean Marcelo Rios, who held the top spot for a total of six weeks.

Sampras regained the No. 1 spot on Aug. 24.

The American, who has won 11 Grand Slam titles — one short of Roy Emerson's record 12 — last season became the first player in ATP history to finish No. 1 for six consecutive seasons.

Martinsen of Norway wins women's 5-km classical

RAMSAU, Austria (AP) — Bente Martinsen of Norway, the Olympic bronze medalist, clinched the gold medal in the women's 5-kilometre classical style cross-country race at the Nordic Ski World Championship Monday.

Martinsen, 26, leads the overall World Cup this season and has had three victories on the circuit. She is a specialist in classical style and won comfortably ahead of Olga Danilova of Russia, the bronze medalist at the 1997 worlds in Trondheim, Norway.

"It was a very good race for me. I had good skis and everything went very well," said Martinsen, who won the first gold for Norwegian woman since 1991.

Katerina Neumannova of the Czech Republic, the silver medalist at the Nagano Olympics last year, took the bronze medal this time.

Neumannova had the fastest time at the first intermediate timing but Martinsen then took the lead and cruised home in 12 minutes, 49.8 seconds, 12.7 seconds ahead of Danilova.

Neumannova was 17.2 seconds behind.

The 5-km is the first leg of the pursuit, which will conclude Tuesday with the 10-km freestyle.

Martinsen's strength is the classical style and she conceded that she had little chance of completing a double.

"I am much better in classical than in skating," she said.

"I will try my best but I think it will be too hard for me," Danilova and Neumannova remain in the hunt for the pursuit title.

"The 10-km will be open and there are some strong ladies behind and there will be a big group fighting for the gold," Neumannova

said.

Two Russians came in fourth and fifth, Svetlana Nageykina and Nina Gavriluk. Nageykina was 25 seconds behind, Gavriluk 29.4.

They were followed by two Ukrainians, Valentina Shevchenko at 40.3 seconds behind and Irina Taranenko-terelia, at 40.7.

Stefania Belmondo of Italy, who won the 15-km freestyle in the opening women's event, came in eighth, trailing 43.7 seconds.

She remains well on target for another gold medal.

Kristina Smigun of Estonia, silver medalist in the 15-km, was just behind at 43.9.

The powerful Russian team dropped Olympic champion Larissa Lazutina from the starting foursome.

"There is strong competition within the Russian squad for places in the starting team," Danilova said.

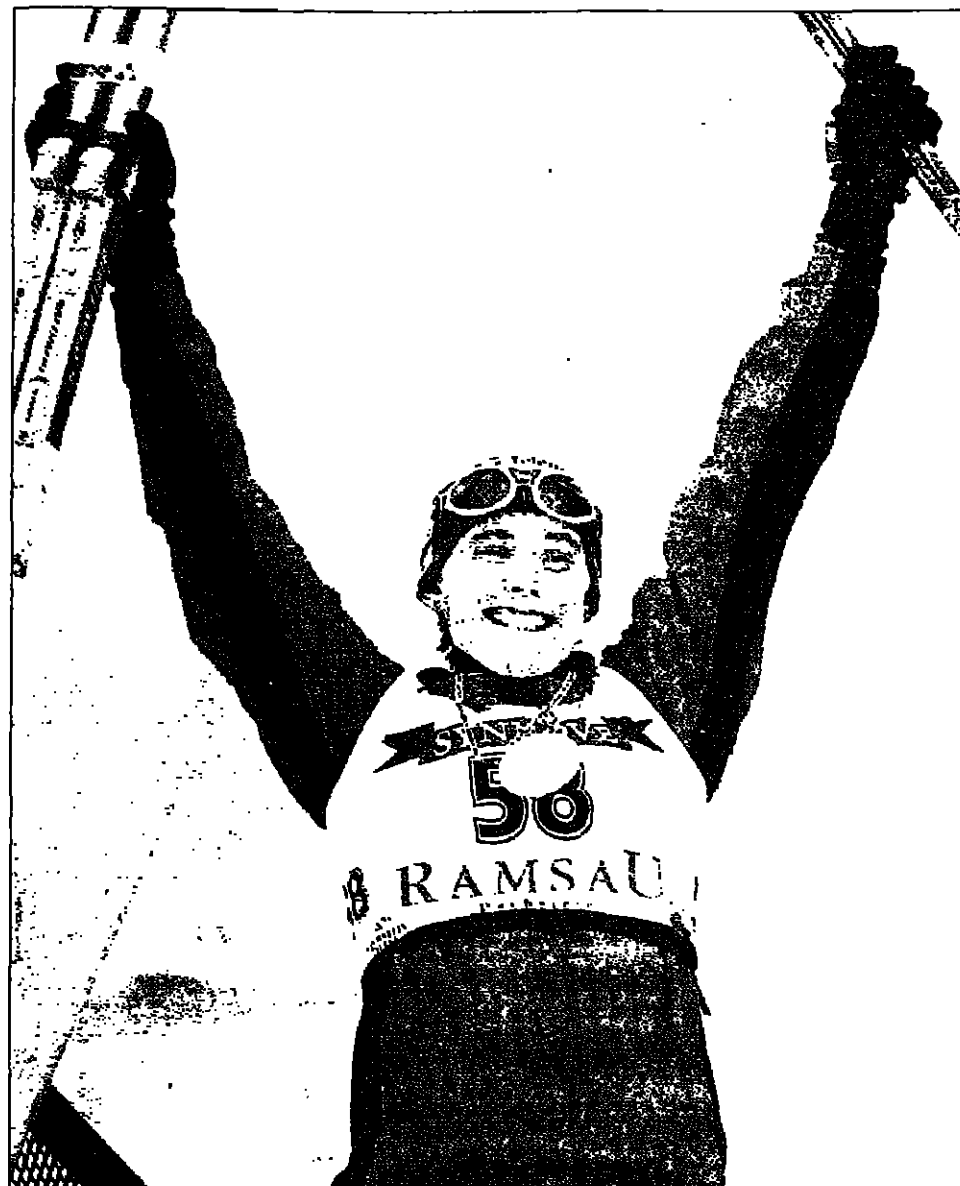
A decade after Jens Weissflog's triumph in Lahti, the Germans have a world champion in ski jumping once again.

Martin Schmitt won the gold on the 120-km hill Sunday, crowning the season in which he has already clinched seven World Cup victories and leading a 1-2 German finish.

Sven Hannawald, in the lead after the first round, took the silver medal on the hill in nearby Bischofshofen.

Mastering foggy conditions, Schmitt collected a total of 263.4 points for his two efforts of 126 and 129.5 metres, beating his good friend Hannawald by a mere 1.7 points.

"My first jump wasn't 100 per cent but the other one was superb," said Schmitt, who had a disappointing 14th place on the same hill last month, wast-



Bente Martinsen of Norway celebrates her victory in the women's 5-km cross-country race in classical technique at the World Nordic Skiing Championships on Monday. Martinsen won the race in a time of 12:49.8 ahead of Olga Danilova of Russia and Katerina Neumannova of the Czech Republic (Reuters photo)

ing a chance to win the prestigious four hill tour.

Schmitt, 21, looks set to follow in the footsteps of Weissflog, who won Olympic titles 10 years apart. Schmitt's youthful exuberance and an outgoing personality have already made him a big star in Germany.

Hannawald, who has been struggling throughout

the season, said he wasn't disappointed by missing the gold.

"My goal was to win a medal but with Schmitt, Ahonen and the Japanese team, I knew it wouldn't be easy," Hannawald said, adding that he's now back in his top shape from last year.

Hideharu Miyahira of Japan took the bronze,

while all four of his teammates finished in the top 10 — an achievement that makes Japan the top favourite for the team competition.

"I finished third in Bischofshofen during the four hill tour. I really like this hill," said the 25-year-old newcomer on the star-studded Japanese team.

Australia's Freeman back on track

SYDNEY (R) — A visit to Sydney's Olympic Stadium and a powerhouse return to competition have left Australia's world 400 metres champion Cathy Freeman hungry to get back into the athletics fast lane.

Freeman, who missed last September's Commonwealth Games with a foot injury, completed her first 400 metres race in seven months in dashing style on Saturday.

The 26-year-old Australian raced away to win in 50.76 seconds, beating Britain's commonwealth games silver medalist Alison Curbishley (51.55).

Although well outside her best, it was enough to have Freeman smiling broadly after the foot problems that sidelined her in the second half of last year and a muscle strain that forced her to miss recent domestic competitions.

"I was really determined and passionate about getting a good, solid run," Freeman said after the win at an international meeting staged on the warm-up track for the 2000 Olympics. She said the hunger to compete still burned brightly.

"I am about trying to win every time I go out there, I am not about titles and medals," Freeman told reporters.

"Even with an egg and spoon in my mouth I am competitive," on Friday Freeman, also the silver medalist behind

France's Marie-Jose Percec at the 1996 Atlanta Olympics, made a trip to the cavernous main stadium for next year's Olympics.

She said later it had helped fire her up for Saturday's race.

"I was doing some stories for a television programme and...they had my Atlanta (Olympics) final run on (the video screen)," said Freeman.

"all the competitor's juices started flowing again," Freeman is scheduled to compete in a relay event at the world indoor championships in Japan next month. Her manager, Nick Bideau, said she might also contest the 400 individual event but would delay a decision until she arrived there.

"She doesn't really like running indoors and she's got to feel comfortable about the track and conditions before she runs in the individual race," Bideau said on Monday.

For now Freeman, who will attempt to defend her world title in Spain later this year, is simply happy to be back on the track.

"I was not supremely confident because I'd had an upset stomach," Freeman said of Saturday's race. "but once I came out to the track everything took care of itself."

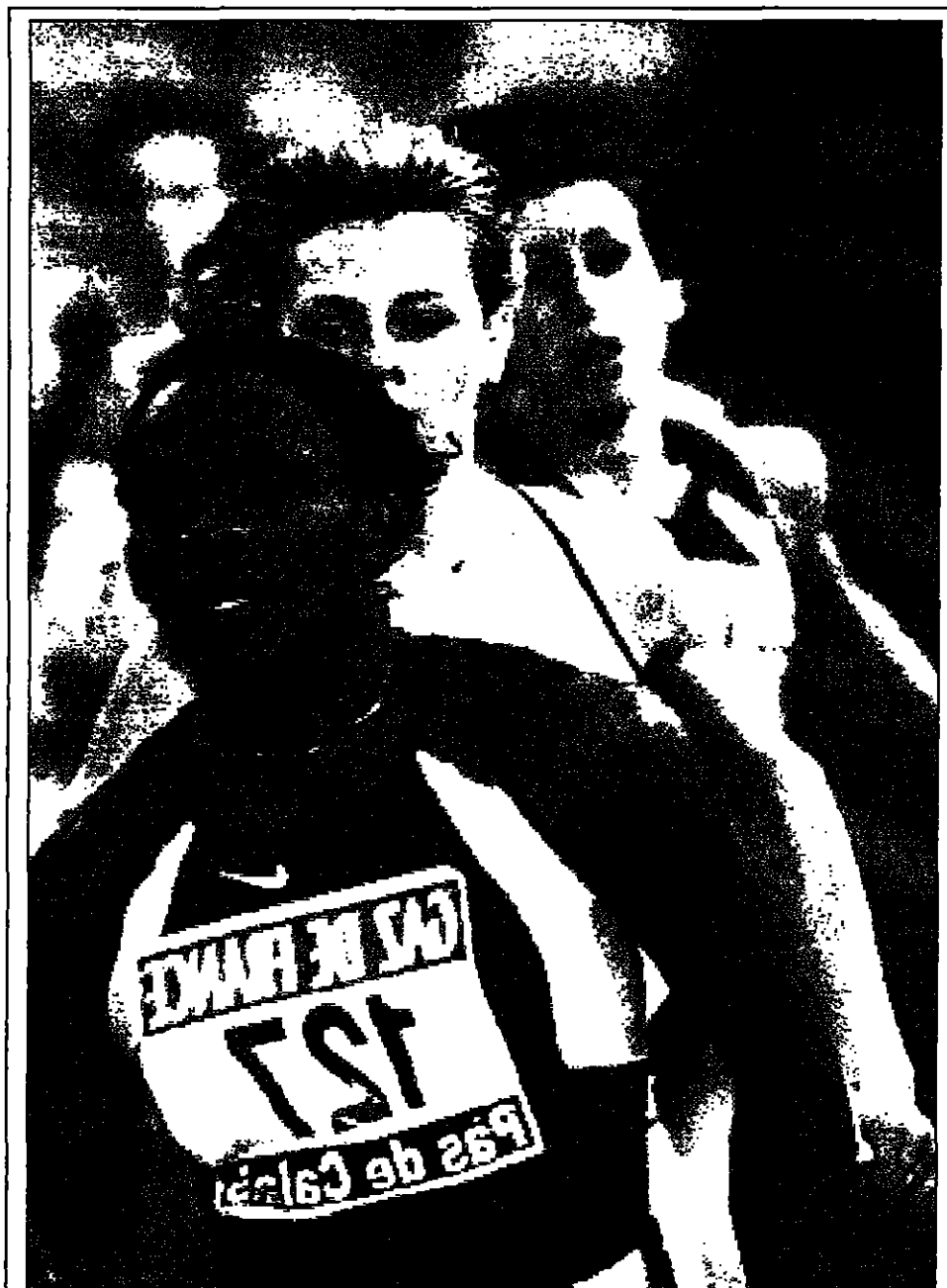
"I just surprised myself. I am just happy to be running again and know where I am in terms of fitness," Saturday's meeting was staged in the shadows of the 110,000-seat main stadium for the Sydney Games.

The stadium is the biggest in modern Olympic history, and can accommodate four jumbo jets side by side under the span of the main arch. It is almost 14 storeys tall at its highest point.

Freeman, however, is happy not to compete there before next year's games.

"I don't want to be in there again, I've seen it. I know what to expect," Freeman told reporters.

Asked if she'd like to see athletics events staged there before the games, she said: "I'd definitely like to see it be held exclusively for the Olympics."



Mozambican runner Maria Mutola leads the pack to win the 800-mtr in 1 minute 57.06 seconds, on Sunday at the international indoor meet in Lievin (AFP photo)

Gebrselassie fails in 3,000m world indoor record attempt

LIEVIN, France (AFP)

Ethiopia's Haile Gebrselassie failed in his attempt to break the indoor 3,000m world record here on Sunday in just his fourth race of the year. The Olympic 10,000m

champion clocked 7:31.25sec, well outside the world record of 7:24.90. It would have been his seventh indoor world record adding to his nine outdoors.

Other world record attempts which went by

the wayside included Gabriella Szabo, who clocked 8min 34.09sec over 3,000m and Mozambique's Maria Mutola, who ran 1:57.06 over 800m.

Finland's Myllyla wins second gold



Mika Myllyla of Finland bites in his two gold medals after the men's 10-km cross-country race in classical technique at the World Nordic Skiing Championships on Monday. Myllyla won the race ahead of Alois Stadlober of Austria and Oddbjorn Hjeltneset of Norway and his second gold so far (Reuters photo)

RAMSAU, Austria (AFP) — Finland's Olympic Champion Mika Myllyla won his second gold title at the Nordic Skiing World Championships here Monday when he took the 10 kilometres cross-country skiing event.

Austria's Alois Stadlober was second, with Odd-Bjorn Hjeltneset of Norway in third.

The 29-year-old also took the 30 kilometres cross-country skiing title on the opening day of the championships on Friday.

After his Friday win Myllyla admitted that he had difficulty concentrating

for the 10-kilometre event, a distance on which he has never before won.

"I couldn't sleep for two nights," said Myllyla. "I felt weak yesterday, but this morning everything was fine. I thought I would have the energy to compete but didn't think of winning gold."

Norway's Bjorn Dachele led for the first 1.5-km of the race, with Myllyla in fourth position. Myllyla gained speed towards the finish and clocked a time of 24 minutes 19 seconds.

"The start wasn't easy. I had difficulty gaining speed," he said. "I thought

that it wouldn't be my day. It was only after the 8-kilometre mark that I thought I had a chance of winning gold and I went for it."

This is the latest win for Myllyla, who took bronze at the winter Olympics in Nagano. He won the 50-km classic at Trondheim, Norway in 1997, where he also took silver in the 15-km freestyle and bronze in the 10-km classic.

"With the gold medal I've become Finland's most successful cross-country skier of all time," he added.

Blair government under fire from press over report on police racism

LONDON (AFP) — British Prime Minister Tony Blair's government was licking its wounds Monday after the country's powerful press forced it to abandon an attempt to keep the lid of secrecy on a controversial report.

Less than a month after Labour launched a new strategy aimed at bypassing the London papers in favour of less "aggressive" ethnic, regional and international media, it stood accused of trying to muzzle the press.

National newspapers on Monday were triumphant after Home Secretary Jack Straw backed down over a court injunction banning the Sunday Telegraph from printing sections of the report.

Due to be published on Wednesday, the independent inquiry's findings accuse the London metropolitan police of "institutionalised racism" in its investigation into the murder of black teenager Stephen Lawrence in 1993.

In a weekend of high drama, Straw late Saturday obtained a court injunction against the Sunday Telegraph.

But the story had already been carried in first editions of the newspaper, and less than 24 hours later the Telegraph and other papers succeeded in a partial lifting of the ban.

Straw defended his actions, insisting that the leaking of the report was "profoundly unfair" to the family of the

murdered black teenager, the police officers involved and to parliament as well.

But this argument was roundly rejected by national newspaper editors.

The Sun, the four-million-selling tabloid which dramatically switched support to Labour from the Conservatives before the May 1997 election, on Monday launched a front-page broadside against the Blair administration.

"Is this the most arrogant cabinet in history?" it asked above a front page photo of Blair and his cabinet.

In an uncharacteristically long two-page editorial, Britain's biggest newspaper lashed at Labour's "control-freak" tendencies.

"What got up the government's nose was that the press was controlling the agenda. And the press — at least, the national papers — have been declared the enemy because most of us refuse to toe the line and be Labour lapdogs."

The liberal Guardian broadsheet argued that the affair had "exposed the frailty of what should be one of our most basic human liberties and supplied a glimpse of what seems an alarmingly authoritarian streak at the highest levels of government."

No state secret had been revealed and national security was not at risk, making a court injunction indefensible, underlined the centre-right Times broadsheet.

"When a government bans the media from reporting a story it must have a good reason to do so."

"Instead this was a fit of pique that the carefully planned 'spin' for the launch of the report on Wednesday has been upset," the newspaper alleged.

Last year, the government blocked the British media from reprinting MI5 agent David Shayler's allegations about the involvement of British security services in an attempted assassination of Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi.

And in an earlier episode, Straw prevented the identity of his son — arrested for selling drugs to an undercover journalist — from being made public under the justification that a minor's privacy had to be protected.

Neither measures were popular, but were respected until the information leaked out elsewhere first.

Labour, which before taking office in the landslide 1997 election, honed the skills of controlling press coverage through an army of "spin doctors," has long been accused of trying to keep the same tight leash in government.

It drew the ire of Fleet Street last month, when after a series of newspaper revelations about the high-spending habits of cabinet ministers, it tried to limit London newspapers' influence by turning to other media seen as more compliant.



MILK QUOTAS ANGER ITALIAN FARMERS: Italian dairy farmers wave flags and shout slogans Monday after passing under the Rialto Bridge in Venice's Grand Canal during a protest against Italian government and EU fines for exceeding milk quotas (AP photo)

Norwegian PM presses Israel to carry out West Bank pullbacks

TEL AVIV (AFP) — Norwegian Prime Minister Kjell Magne Bondevik called on Israel's right-wing government Monday to carry out promised West Bank withdrawals despite upcoming national elections.

Bondevik, who met in Gaza City Sunday with Palestinian President Yasser Arafat and Monday in Jerusalem with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, said he had urged both men to honour the Wye River land-for-security deal signed last October.

"I have emphasised both to the Israeli prime minister and to Yasser Arafat the importance of implementing the Wye memorandum, and this includes also the [West Bank] withdrawals," Bondevik said during a joint press conference with Netanyahu.

"Although we understand that there are difficulties in the middle of an election campaign here to move ahead with speed, I have expressed the need to keep the peace process on track," Bondevik also said he

he said.

Netanyahu in December suspended further West Bank pullbacks called for under the Wye agreement, citing what he said was a Palestinian failure to honour their commitments under the accord, primarily concerning the fight against terrorism.

Despite his decision to freeze the peace accord, Netanyahu's governing coalition collapsed in December, largely due to opposition by hardline allies to further territorial concessions to the Palestinians.

Early elections have been called for May and the Palestinians have accused Netanyahu of holding up the Wye agreement to avoid antagonising right-wing voters ahead of the polls.

Despite the difficulties, Bondevik said his talks here and in Gaza City had left him "convinced that both Prime Minister Netanyahu and Yasser Arafat are deeply committed to the peace process and want to keep it on track."

Bondevik also said he

believed Arafat would ultimately back down on his declared intention to unilaterally declare an independent state on May 4, when interim peace accords with Israel expire.

Netanyahu reiterated warnings Monday that such a move would "collapse the peace process" and lead Israel to take unilateral steps of its own, meaning the annexation of occupied territory.

But Bondevik said that following his talks with the Palestinian leader "my impression is that Yasser Arafat is open-minded and flexible, in order to find a sensible solution in the interests of both parties and in the interest of the peace process."

"Like everybody, we realise that the parties need more time after the fourth of May and also after the elections in Israel to negotiate a permanent peace accord, he said.

Arafat said on Sunday that the Palestinians were consulting with "friends and

brothers" about the May 4 deadline and other Palestinian officials suggested a statehood declaration could be postponed until the end of the year.

Noting that Norway hosted the secret negotiations between Israel and the PLO which led to the so-called Oslo interim peace accords, Bondevik said his government would continue its "modest and discreet" efforts to revive the peace process.

The Norwegian added that he had invited Arafat to Oslo for further talks "before the fourth of May."

Netanyahu for his part voiced optimism that he would be reelected in May and vowed to press ahead with negotiations on a final peace accord with the Palestinians.

"I believe we will win the elections and that we will have a mandate from the people to negotiate firmly, responsibly towards a completed agreement with the Palestinians which would give peace, security and hope for both our people," he said.

Netanyahu hails EU decision to allow Israel into project

TEL AVIV (AFP) — Israel welcomed a decision Monday by the European Union (EU) to renew Israel's participation in a multi-billion dollar EU research and development programme despite European concern over the lack of progress in the Palestinian peace process.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he had been informed of the decision by the EU Council of Ministers meeting in Luxembourg while holding talks here

with Norwegian Prime Minister Kjell Magne Bondevik.

"This is very important for Israel and we believe it is very important for the EU," Netanyahu said during a joint press conference with Bondevik.

Netanyahu went on to note that Israel was emerging as the principal competitor to California's Silicon Valley as a global centre of high-tech innovation.

Israel was the only non-European country to take

part in the EU research and development programme during its first four-year session which ended last year.

The 1999-2002 phase of the programme will have a budget of 14.9 billion euros (\$17.6 billion).

Israel had angrily attacked the EU over a preliminary decision in December not to renew its participation in the programme following Netanyahu's decision to suspend implementation of the Wye River peace accord with the Palestinians.

EU officials denied any political motivation for the decision.

But the union's foreign ministers appeared to confirm Israeli suspicions when they issued a statement last month saying the union "deplored the continued suspension by the Israeli government of the implementation of the land-for-security memorandum."

It described Netanyahu's refusal to carry out further West Bank withdrawals required by the accord as a

"contravention of both the spirit and the letter of the memorandum."

Monday's EU turnaround followed a vote in the European Parliament earlier this month endorsing Israel's continued participation in the research and development programme.

Netanyahu has justified his freeze on the accord by citing alleged Palestinian violations of the agreement, which required Arafat to crack down on anti-Israel activities by Palestinians.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Kazakh woman mummifies mum

ALMATY (R) — A woman in the former Soviet republic of Kazakhstan, saying she was unable to afford funeral costs, has been arrested after mummifying her dead mother and three other relatives, police said Monday. A police officer doing a routine check of documents noticed an odd smell coming from the woman's apartment, senior police inspector Rafik Valiyev told Reuters. Taking a closer look, the officer found three corpses sitting against a wall and another in a cardboard box. The woman said they were relatives who had died from various illnesses. The police said the woman, a graduate from a medical institute, explained she had mummified the bodies because she did not have enough money to pay for a burial. Autopsies were being done and murder charges had been filed against her.

Lebanon court punishes pigeon woman

HALBA (AFP) — A court in northern Lebanon sentenced a woman to pay 20,000 Lebanese pounds (\$13) or spend four days in jail because her pigeons pecked municipal flowers, judicial sources said Monday. A municipal guard in Halba ticketed Wafaa Hammoud, 39, because her pigeons and chickens were eating flowers and seeds planted by the municipality, they said. Hammoud was accused of failing to keep caged her birds which were "destroying plants and flowers in the municipal garden," they added. The woman said she cannot afford to pay the fine and had been raising the creatures for a living.

Iraq to send delegation to Vatican

BAGHDAD (AFP) — President Saddam Hussein is to send an Islamic-Christian delegation to the Vatican to thank the Pope for his support of Iraq, a Christian leader here said Monday. Chaldean Patriarch Raphael I Bidawid said the visit could take place in early March. He will lead the delegation which will also comprise two Muslim clerics and a foreign ministry official. "This visit reflects the appreciation of the Iraqi state for Pope John Paul II. His Holiness always calls for an end to injustice towards the people of the world, and especially the Iraqi people," he said.

Yemeni PM beats malaria

SANAA (AFP) — Yemeni Prime Minister Abdul Karim Al Iryani has returned from Germany where he was being treated for malaria, the official SABA news agency reported Monday. Iryani left Sanaa on Feb. 12 for a hospital in Germany for tests and treatment.

Palestinians rally in support of Kurds

NABLUS (AFP) — Masked Palestinians brandishing mock weapons burned U.S. and Israeli flags and ripped up makeshift Turkish banners in a demonstration of support Monday for captured Kurdish rebel leader Abdullah Ocalan. About 300 Palestinian youths gathered at Al Najah University for a rally announced as an anniversary celebration of the creation 31 years ago of the leftist PLO faction, the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP). Masked protesters carried portraits of Ocalan alongside pictures of DFLP leader Nayef Hawatmeh.

PNA to block attacks — Mordechai

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM (R) — Former Israeli Defence Minister Yitzhak Mordechai said on Monday the Palestinian National Authority had decided to prevent guerrilla attacks against Israel in the run-up to the May general election. Mordechai said Palestinian leaders made the position clear in contacts with him after the Wye River land-for-security deal broke down in December. "It will be very difficult in the future to put the peace process back on track [if an attack is perpetrated now]," Mordechai, a centrist candidate for prime minister, told visiting leaders of U.S. Jewish groups. "They are clever enough to understand that now, in the time of the election, if some of them make a mistake [and fail to prevent an attack] it will... damage the whole agreement. And they decided to wait a few months and to see what will happen."

'Iranian moderates barred from polls'

TEHRAN (R) — Iran's first nationwide local polls were thrown into confusion just four days before the vote, when a conservative supervision board barred candidates backing moderate President Mohammad Khatami from the race, pro-reform newspapers said on Monday.

The newspapers reported a last-minute bid by the panel, backed by hardliners in parliament, to block the leading figures of the pro-Khatami ticket from Friday's elections.

The board's order, which was immediately challenged by Khatami's interior ministry, came after several days of campaigning for races the president and his allies hope will ease the grip of the conservative clerical establishment.

"Despite the passage of three days of campaigning, the supervisory board rejected the main candidates of the [pro-Khatami] front," said the daily Salam.

The ban, if allowed to stand, was expected to dampen public enthusiasm for what has been billed by Khatami supporters and independent analysts alike as Iran's first real experience with grassroots democracy.

Salam said the order barring the candidates had been issued in a letter from the supervisory board to the interior minister, sent late on Sunday. Other pro-reform newspapers carried similar reports.

Tight Algerian elections may mean second round of voting

RABAT (R) — Algeria's April 15 presidential election is expected to be a tight race that could force leading contenders into a second round of voting, analysts and Western diplomats said on Monday.

But this hinges on whether the influential army keeps its pledge to stay neutral, amid complaints by opposition leaders that the military is reluctant to relinquish its 37-year grip on the levers of power, they said.

More than 30 politicians are vying to lead the violence-torn North African country into the next millennium. Some have said their aim is to defeat former Foreign Minister Abdulkaziz Bouteflika, widely seen as the army candidate.

"This big participation makes the poll

extremely interesting. It is very hard to see a winner in the first round," a senior Western diplomat told Reuters.

Many Algerian analysts and politicians agree, albeit for different reasons. "I think that this idea of a consensus candidate is nonsense," said Mokrane Ait Larbi, a parliamentary deputy and human rights activist, referring to Bouteflika's candidacy.

Ait Larbi and other analysts said Bouteflika had burned many bridges, particularly with independent and opposition figures who say he is being imposed by the military, which has dominated Algerian politics since independence from France in 1962.

Another possible disadvantage for Bouteflika is that he quit domestic poli-

tics after the death of President Houari Boumedienne in 1978, and has since worked as a consultant for Gulf Arab governments.

Bouteflika, 61, will compete against powerful opponents like Ahmad Taleb Ibrahim, an ex-foreign minister who advocates dialogue with Islamists, former Prime Minister Mouloud Hamrouche who began economic reforms in 1989, and veteran opposition leader Hocine Ait Ahmed.

"Politicians like Ait Ahmed, Hamrouche and Ibrahim will certainly make it difficult for Bouteflika to win in the first round. That is of course if the election takes a normal course, without fraud," Ait Larbi said.

Political analysts said the three politi-

cians might join forces against Bouteflika in the second round, which would be needed if no candidate won more than 50 per cent of the vote in the first round. Some 15 million people are eligible to vote.

Bouteflika has been further weakened by outgoing President Liamine Zeroual's promise of a "fair and transparent" poll with equal opportunities for all contenders, indicating that the government had no preferred candidate.

Zeroual, who is stepping down 19 months early, has warned of unspecified measures against government officials who try to sway the outcome of the election.

Two days ago Lieutenant General Mohammed Lamari, the army chief of

staff, ordered his men to "prepare the conditions for a fair poll."

Boudjaoui, a highly respected judge, as head of the election committee, and approved what he called complementary measures sought by opposition parties to prevent vote-rigging which has clouded previous polls.

"Zeroual's short speech [last week] contained a lot of warnings to those willing to use the military institution and impose their choice," one diplomat said.

Zeroual and other leading politicians, under pressure from mounting economic and social problems aggravated by the slump in oil prices, appear determined to find a constructive way forward for Algeria.

Arafat seeks support from Germany

BONN (AP) — Yasser Arafat said Monday he was ready to discuss his plan to unilaterally declare a Palestinian state, the latest sign he may back off a May target date.

"We are very concerned to ensure that we talk with our friends about this question," the Palestinian leader said after meeting chancellor Gerhard Schröder in Bonn.

With Mideast peacekeeping stalled, Schröder said the Palestinians have a right to their own state "in principle," but he called for renewed diplomacy for the moment.

"We both agree that it will be essential to bring about close consultation within Europe and between Europe and the United States on this point," Schröder told reporters. "That will certainly happen in the weeks and months ahead."

Arafat has suggested he would declare statehood on May 4, the end of a five-year autonomy period spelled out in the Oslo peace accord with Israel.

But Western and Arab nations are pressing Arafat to hold off because they worry it would worsen peace prospects with Israel, which holds elections on May 17.

Schröder pledged that Germany would continue to make "a significant contribution" to aiding the Palestinians.

He also said he told Arafat that Germany "very strongly supports activities of German firms active in the Palestinian areas."

Germany is the Palestinians' biggest European aid donor, and German industrial giant Siemens played a leading role in building a Palestinian airport in Gaza.

Arafat was quoted Sunday as saying he hopes "that there will be joint ventures between German, Palestinian and Israeli companies in the near future."

King receives

King receives condolences from Omani official

At least seven dead in Austrian avalanche

U.S. group reports sharp rise in Web hate sites

Pinochet's son seeks funds from Cuban exiles

Man immolates self after death of pigs

Man set himself on fire after three days of mourning

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